The World's Leading Mystery Ma

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

APRIL 35¢

A New Story by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

MICHAEL GILBERT

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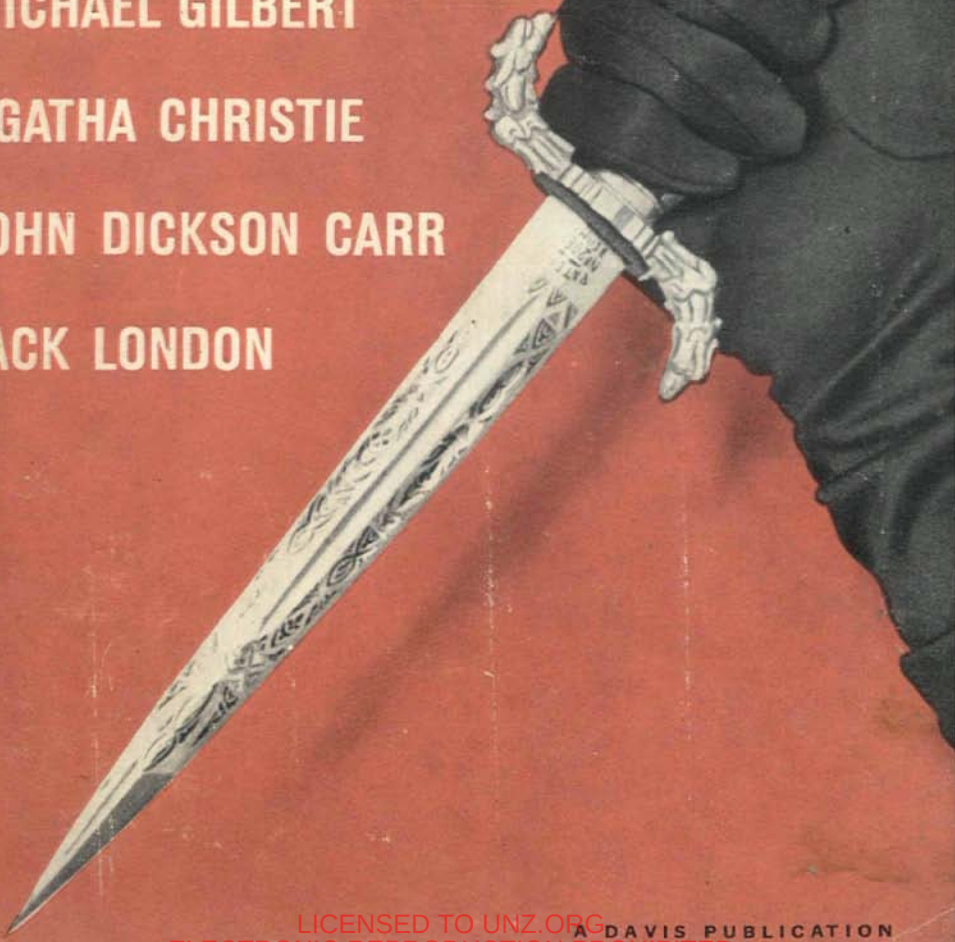

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

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Printed in 7 editions — American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

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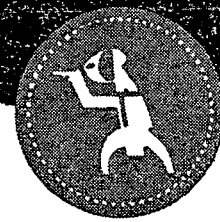

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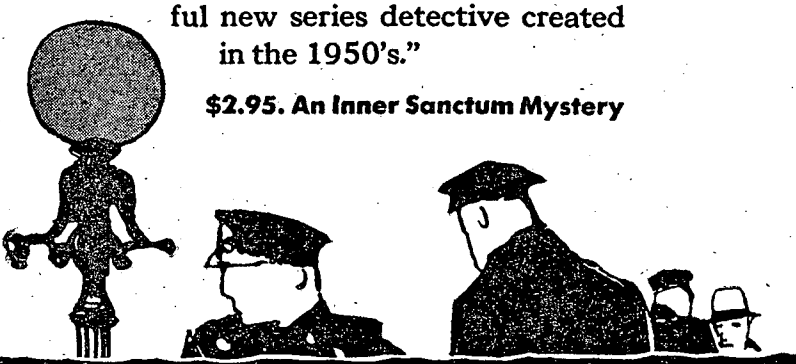

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a new story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

The Terror of Pardoe Street

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	MICHAEL GILBERT
TITLE:	*The Terror of Pardoe Street*
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Petrella
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*"Bash" was hardly a model prisoner. When he got out with maximum time off for good behavior, there must have been a reason—a special reason . . .*

IT WAS BERNARD WHO FIRST TOLD Petrella that "Bash" Warrender was out. Bernard used to park his taxi at the end of Gabriel Street, and he recognized it as his privilege to take Detective-Inspector Petrella home in the evenings when that hard-worked man was late or in a hurry. He liked to leave the intervening partition open so that he could drive and talk at the same time.

"Ol' Bash," said Bernard, "he comes out this morning. Maximum remission for good behavior doesn't sound like Bash, eh?"

Petrella had never met Bash, who had been in the middle of a two-year stretch for a rail depot robbery when Petrella first came to Gabriel Street nine months before; but he had heard plenty of stories of "The Terror of Pardoe Street." Petrella agreed that good behavior was not the sort of thing normally associated with Bash.

"You know what I think—stick your hand out that far, lady, I'll kiss it" (this to a woman driver who was signaling her intention of turning to the right)—"what I think is, he was what you might call holding himself in."

"And why would he do that?"

"He was holding himself in because he wanted to get out of clink as quick as possible."

"If I went to prison," said Pe-

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trella, "I'd always want to get out as quick as possible."

"Some people mind it less than others," said Bernard. "Ol' Bash, actually it's all the same to him if he's in or out. He gets better grub when he's inside, but they won't give him anything to drink. He's all right, Ol' Bash, except when he's got a skinful—then you want to watch your step! What I was saying, this time he had a *special* reason for getting out quick. That's why he behaved himself."

"And what would that special reason be?"

"That job he went up for, he wasn't in it alone. There was Mick Moran—you know Mick?"

Petrella knew Mick.

"And two or three others as well. But Mick was the one that organized it. Everyone knew *that.*"

"Except the police, apparently."

"I reckon the police knew it all right. Only they couldn't tie it to Mick. The only one they could pin was Bash. They caught *him* right on the job, inside the shed, with a jemmy and a pair of bolt shears he'd used to cut the padlock off the door. He couldn't talk *them* away."

Petrella said, "It sounds as if he had a bad break. But I don't see what he's got to complain about. He can't be lucky all the time."

"Bash reckons it wasn't bad luck. He reckons Mick shopped him."

"Why would Mick do that?"

"They had a difference of opinion," said Bernard, "in the Saloon Bar of the Keys. Bash hit Mick with a pint mug. So when he found the cops actually, as you might say, laying for him—one inside the shed and two outside—well, he got the idea it was Mick that tipped them off."

"If Bash thinks Mick did that," said Petrella, "we'd better watch out for storms."

"Speaking personally," said Bernard, "I don't see why you should bother. I'd let 'em both cut each other's heads off. None of us'd be a penny the poorer if they did would we? Here we are. Home again. Didden take too long, did it?"

Petrella had rooms, at that time, on the second floor of a house in Brinkman Road, Blackheath. It was a good distance outside the Division and this had both advantages and disadvantages. It was a nuisance when he was called out at night, and had to get back home after all public transportation had ceased. The real advantage of the arrangement was that when he did get home, he felt he had effectively left his work behind him.

He ate his supper, washed up, laid out breakfast for the next morning, poured himself a glass of doubtful port, took off his collar and tie, turned on the wireless, and selected one of nine books on Contract Bridge from the shelf beside his chair. He was immersed in the subtleties of the Vienna coup, to the appropriate strains of a Vienna

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waltz, when the front doorbell rang.

Petrella frowned, but made no immediate move. He was trying to decide who it could possibly be. The owners of the house, the Wetheralls, never bothered to ring. Mrs. Wetherall sometimes rattled the door handle—to eliminate the possibility of surprising Petrella in an embarrassing state of undress. Mr. Wetherall always barged straight in.

The bell rang again.

Petrella got unwillingly to his feet, paddled across, and opened the door.

Standing outside was a woman. In her early thirties, he judged, and good-looking once. Black hair, white face, and high cheekbones suggested a mid-European origin. Her clothes were shabby, but neat.

These were all secondary impressions. Petrella's attention was concentrated on her right cheek, where a savage bruise was still bleeding.

"I'm sorry I was so slow," he said. "Has there been an accident?"

"An accident, no." Her voice confirmed Petrella's first impression. Polish, he guessed. "No, I came to you for protection."

"You are—?"

"I am Mrs. Warrender."

"I see," said Petrella. "Come in. I take it your husband has been celebrating his release?"

"He came back this morning." said the woman. She spoke in a matter-of-fact, unshocked voice which demonstrated more clearly than hysterics what life with Bash was likely to be. "I gave him some money. He went out again. He said he was looking for a man he wished to kill. He did not find him, but he found plenty to drink. Early this evening he came back and I gave him something to eat."

Petrella had a strangely clear picture of this meal. A kitchen table, the pale quiet woman at one end, and at the other, couchant and embattled, as he shoveled food into himself, the big brute, red-eyed, glowering, already more than half drunk.

"What happened?" he said.

"I said something which annoyed him. He threw his cup at me. It broke the glass in the door. That seemed to annoy him more. He came across and hit me. He did other things to me as well."

She held out her hands, palm upward, and Petrella could see, on each wrist, the livid prints of four long, thin fingers. So fierce had been the grip that the mark of each individual finger was still clear in the flesh.

"After he had humiliated me he left me," said the woman. "He went to drink. I was afraid to remain."

She sat, looking at him, as if hoping for some solution to the insoluble problem she presented. When and why had she married him? At the age of sixteen or seventeen, probably, thought Petrella. During or just after the war. To avoid go-

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ing back to Poland? If there had been some motive of duplicity in the marriage, she had been paying for it with interest ever since.

"I'd keep you here for the night," he said, "only—"

"I quite realize that would not be possible." A fleeting smile crossed her face and Petrella realized again how attractive she must have been before life had trapped her.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs brought him to his feet.

Then, as the footsteps passed his door, he guessed that it was old Mr. Wetherall, the headmaster of the South Borough High School, who occupied the top flat with his wife and eight-year-old son.

It gave him an idea. The Wetheralls were practical samaritans; and they had a sofa. Mrs. Warrender said, "It is kind of you. But I could not agree. If my husband discovered, it would make trouble for your friends—"

"I would guess," said Petrella, "that Mr. Wetherall is well able to look after himself. You sit tight, while I have a word with him."

Mr. Wetherall, a weather-beaten man with a remarkable facial resemblance to the Duke of Wellington, hardly blinked at the idea that a strange young lady should occupy his sofa. Twenty-five years of schoolmastering in South London had made him a difficult man to surprise.

"Of course she can," he said. "We'll have to put Simba in the kitchen. She'll scratch on the door a bit. Warn her about that. And ask her if she likes coffee or tea for breakfast. It's no extra trouble—we drink both."

Petrella set his alarm clock for half-past five the next morning and was out in the quiet sunlit streets by a quarter past six. He caught an early bus and was in Southwark twenty minutes later.

Pardoe Street is a dead end, running down to the railway. One side is a brick wall; the other, a row of tiny, unsanitary cottages, blackened and eroded stumps, still standing, against all the laws of probability, like the last few defiant teeth of a nonagenarian.

All the doors were shut and the windows discreetly curtained. Number 14 was at the end, nearest to the railway, and Petrella, knowing the ways of such houses, avoided the front door and made his way down the flagged passage to the back.

The back door was open. In the kitchen the dirty dishes on the table and the unwashed saucepans in the sink bore witness to the haste of Mrs. Warrender's departure the previous night. The door leading into the front hall had two long panes of frosted glass. The left hand one had been freshly shattered. The break in the glass was shaped like an Indian's headdress, feathers and all.

Petrella stood for a few seconds looking at it seriously. Then he

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stepped forward, his feet scrunching the pieces of broken glass scattered across the floor. He pushed the door open and went through, into the front hall.

On his right was the single downstairs room. He looked in, but it was empty, dark, and smelled of disuse.

As he stood there listening, he located a noise. Someone was snoring.

He walked up the steep-pitched stairs, with its narrow treads. On his left, directly over the unused parlor, lay the only other room in the house. Petrella hesitated for a moment, then knocked gently. The snoring continued unabated. He opened the door and looked in.

A man lay on the bed, fully dressed except for his coat, his boots sticking out from the end of the cotton bedspread which only partly covered him. Petrella kicked the end of the bed. Its occupant rolled over.

He was one of the ugliest men Petrella had ever seen. Under a friz of gray-black hair, two bloodshot eyes looked out. They protruded, but in slightly different directions. Below them was a nose which had been broken several times and had only sketchily reset, a mouth of yellow tusks, and a chin decorated with two days' stubble. Across the chin ran a fresh deep cut.

"Ooer you?" said the ugly man.

"I'm a Detective-Inspector," said Petrella, "and I've come to tell you that while you're in my Division you've got to behave yourself."

Bash Warrender sat up slowly. Petrella saw that his forearms were covered with a mat of black hair; from the backs of his spatulate fingers sprouted more hair in the midst of which winked two heavy gold signet rings, like splashes of sunlight in a dark forest.

Bash completed the task of hoisting himself upright. He did it slowly because the room was spinning round in front of him. His divergent eyes focused on Petrella's face. They seemed surprised at what they saw.

"You a flattie?" he said.

"That's right," said Petrella.

"You got no right in here. I haven't done nothing."

"You call knocking your wife about nothing?"

"Who said I knocked her about?"

"She said so. Not that it was necessary. She's got a bruise on her face, and a cut. I imagine that one of those rings of yours did the damage."

Bash had lost him by this time. Two Petrellas swam slowly in front of him, twin moons in a milky way. He made a supreme effort. The faces came together and seemed to be looking down at him severely.

"We had an argument," he muttered. "She walked out."

"She's walking back again, today," said Petrella. "And if you lay a hand on her you'll go inside again. For quite a long time."

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"She can come back if she likes," said Bash. "It's her house."

On this qualified note of apology Petrella took himself off. He had breakfast at a café in the New Kent Road, read the cricket scores in his favorite newspaper, and got to Gabriel Street by nine o'clock.

At ten o'clock Sergeant Lowther looked in and said, "We've got Mick Moran. Says he wants to see you."

"Show him in," said Petrella.

Mick was an Irishman. Petrella knew him as a man who fought for the fun of it and bore few grudges. His opening words were the more surprising. "I'm making an application," he said, "for a gun."

"You mean, you want a license to carry a gun?"

"A license, that's it."

"What sort of gun?"

"It's not a sporting gun I'm after," said Mick, "but a pistol."

Petrella thought hard. Then he pulled across a scribbling pad and said, "Perhaps you'd better let me have the details."

"Details?"

"Of the pistol you want the license for. Make, calibre, number—that sort of thing."

"How can I tell you that sort of thing when I haven't yet got the gun?"

Petrella said, "The Court can't grant a general license. It has to be a license for a definite weapon."

"And if I showed it to you—so that you could write all these details down—you'd take me up for having a gun without a license!"

"Something in that," admitted Petrella. "Look here, perhaps you'd better tell me what you want it for."

"You know very well why I want it," said Mick. "Isn't Bash Warrender out? And going about breathing fire and slaughter against me for something I never did?"

"Has he been doing that?"

"Last night at the Keys—when he'd filled himself up with whiskey and beer and the courage that goes with them."

"Were you down at the Keys yourself?"

"I was not down at the Keys. Would you have me provoke a breach of the peace? But there were plenty there who heard him."

"Such as—"

"Leo Korner, for one."

"I'll have a word with Leo," said Petrella. "But I don't think you want to make too much of this. And in particular, if I were you, I think I should dump that gun—the one you haven't yet got, I mean."

Petrella had a message sent out and met Leo Korner, by arrangement, that afternoon in a tea shop near the Elephant and Castle. There was little about Leo to suggest the monarch of the forest. He was a slight young man, with dark, wavy hair. Leo was short for Leopold. His family came from Belgium, and he was an electroplater.

"That's right," he said. "I was in

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the Keys last night when Bash came in. About eight o'clock it would be. He was carrying on like a madman. The landlord would have thrown him out, if he had been able to."

"Not an easy man to throw out," agreed Petrella. "What was he carrying on about in particular?"

"Most of it was about Mick Moran, and how Mick was a snout, and what he was going to do to Nick when he caught him."

"Had he cut his chin?"

This simple question seemed to puzzle Leo. He thought hard about it. Then he said that he rather thought that he had. It was difficult to be sure.

Petrella went back to his office a badly worried man.

"Any fool," as he said to Superintendent Benjamin when reporting the matter to him later, "could see there was trouble coming. The difficulty was knowing just what to do about it."

In the end he thought of Bernard.

"I want you to do something for me," said Petrella.

"As long as it's not dangerous," said Bernard. "I've got a weak heart."

"It's just an inquiry. I can't do it myself. I want you to go down to the Keys and find out from some of the regulars, just what *did* happen there last night. Bash was in there, kicking up a shindig. I want to know *what* he said, and try to find out if anyone noticed whether or not he had a cut on his chin."

"I'll have to stand 'em a few drinks."

"Ten bob should get them started. You can park in the vacant lot behind the pub—I'll make it right with the man on the beat. I'll be inside the cab, about ten o'clock."

"Do what I can," said Bernard.

At a quarter past nine under cover of dusk Petrella strolled down Pardoe Street. There was a light showing under the street door, but the front room was dark. He drew back into the shadows and waited.

Heavy footsteps sounded at the end of the street. Petrella backed still farther into the corner of the wall. There was no lamp at that end, and he had turned up his coat to conceal the whiteness of his shirt and collar.

The man who was approaching had no eyes for possible watchers. He stumped up to the door of the end house and knocked. At once there came the double thud of bolts being opened, top and bottom. Mrs. Warrender must have been waiting for her visitor. Petrella saw her clearly in the light of the opened door. He recognized the visitor too. It was Mick Moran. The front door slammed and the bolts were shot again.

He looked down at his watch. The illuminated hands stood at twenty minutes to ten. The puppets were moving to their cues, under the hand of the puppet master.

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Twenty minutes later Petrella was sitting in the back of Bernard's cab listening to its owner.

"Bash is in there right now," said Bernard.

"Which bar?"

"Public bar. The saloon's round the front."

"What's he doing?"

"He's sitting, wedged up against a corner of the bar, drinking beer. Surprising how much beer a man can put away if he gives his mind to it, innit? Leo's with him."

Petrella nodded. He had felt sure that Leo would be with him.

"And what did you find out about last night?"

"That's funny," said Bernard. "I talked to two or three of 'em—before Bash came in, that was—Porky Hogg, Chum Harrison, Bill Bailey, that lot, from the market. They were all there last night. They said Bash was there, all right. And he'd been drinking. But nothing to write home about. And none of them heard him say anything about Mick. Actually, he was singing most of the time."

"Singing?"

"That's right. Hear Bash sing *Rock of Ages,* bring tears to your eyes. That bit about the water and the blood. The boys always enjoy that."

"I see," said Petrella. "Did anyone notice his chin?"

"Porky said he'd got cut on it. Definitely. It was bleeding a bit."

"I was afraid of that," said Petrella. "Is there anywhere we could watch without him seeing us?"

"Private Bar. No one ever goes in there. I'll go in first and have a dekko."

Bernard reported the Private Bar empty. It made an admirable observation post, commanding the other Public bars, but screened from it by an extension of the dividing partition.

It was approaching closing time. The Saloon Bar was cheerful. The Public Bar was bedlam. It gave out a blast of heat and noise, a tangible emenation of spirits which reached even the secluded backwater in which they waited.

Petrella could see Bash. He was, as Bernard had said, wedged into the corner between the end of the bar and the wall. Close up against him, talking almost into his ear, was Leo. What Petrella could see of Bash's expression was ugly.

"More blood than water tonight," said Bernard.

"I wish I could hear what Leo was saying to him."

"You wouldn't hear a nine-five howitzer go off in this little lot," said Bernard. "Blimey. There he goes. What's bitten him now?"

Bash had suddenly risen to his feet. His staring eyes were nearly as red as his face. His mouth was working, his great hands clenching and unclenching.

"Looks as if he's having some sort of fit," said Bernard thoughtfully. "Gor blimey he's off again."

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Bash had picked up a pint glass and smashed it down three or four times on the counter till it cracked and broke, leaving the handle and a splitered halo of glass in his hand.

They saw the landlord groping under the counter for the truncheon he kept there against such emergencies. Before he could find it, Bash was gone, cleaving his way through a crowd suddenly fallen silent. Then the door swung shut behind him and the hubbub broke out again.

"Get your cab out and we'll follow him," said Petrella. "But give him plenty of room. We shan't lose him now—he's going home."

"Why don't we get ahead?" said Bernard, "and warn his missus. If he gets home and finds her there he'll carve her up."

"No," said Petrella. "I think we'll stick right behind him."

"You're the boss," said Bernard.

"Besides," said Petrella, "if I'm right it's not his wife he's after. It's Mick Moran."

They had no difficulty keeping Bash in sight. He forged steadily ahead. The night air seemed to be doing him good. He passed a patrolling policeman, who looked at him curiously, but let him go on.

"Quite steady on his pins really," said Bernard. "Here we are. Pardoe Street on the right."

"Leave the cab here," said Petrella.

They looked cautiously down the short dark street. Bash had reached his own house. He, too, seemed to be proceeding now with some caution. He tried the front door, found it locked, came back down the steps, and pushed open the gate leading into the side passage.

Petrella said to Bernard, "You can fetch your cab up now. We may need it.

Then he, too, tiptoed down the passage and into the back yard. He arrived there at the exact moment that Bash put the sole of one boot against the back kitchen door, kicked it open, and surged into the kitchen.

Petrella pressed his nose against the kitchen window. He reckoned that no one inside would have eyes for him, and he could see and hear nicely.

"So that's what goes on behind my back!" yelled Bash.

"You've no call to say that." Mick was on his feet. "She asked me to come round. Why wouldn't I?"

"Soon's my back's turned!'

"Anything we done," said Mick, "we'd do again in front of you, it'd make no difference."

Bash jumped. Drink had slowed him, but not much. Mick ducked the swing, tore himself free from the grabbing clutch that followed, and got back behind the table. The positions were now reversed. Mick and the woman were on Petrella's side, with their backs to him. Bash was crouched opposite.

Suddenly he dipped, picked up the table, and heaved it. Mick coun-

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tered by grabbing the edge nearest to him. The table rose between them, like flotsam on the crest of a wave. As it rose the drawer slid out and kitchen utensils, knives, potato peelers, and skewers cascaded to the floor. Both men let go at the same time, and the table crashed in between them.

There was now something black in the woman's hand. She was thrusting it on Mick.

"He'll murder us both," she cried. "Use it quick. It's your only chance."

Mick looked down at the gun in his hand. He seemed puzzled to think how it had got there. Bash looked at it too. Petrella realized that Bash was far from drunk—much of his fury seemed to have abated.

"Put it down, Mick," said Bash. "Are you an Irishman? You can settle a little difference with your hands, now."

"Sure. I'm not afraid of you," said Mick. "Take your toy back, woman."

"You fool," said Mrs. Warrender. The unexpected lash in her voice cracked so sharply that both men threw their heads back, as if she had in fact struck them both across the face.

"If you haven't the guts to do it," she said, "after all he's done to me —"

Her hand came up slowly, the knuckles white.

Petrella grabbed wildly for a weapon, found the lid of the dust bin to his hand, and, with it, burst the window inward, glass and all.

Echoing the splintering crack came the roar of the gun.

Bash went down on his knees, as Mick and Petrella reached the woman from different sides.

She had fired four times before they got the gun away from her.

"Not dead," said Petrella to Superintendent Benjamin a few weeks later. "Not even badly wounded. You can't hurt a man like Bash. He's not living with his wife any more, of course."

"Where's she?"

"Mrs. Warrender's living with Leo. Which I'd guess was her intention all along. Bash had teamed up with Mick. They seem to have got over their differences."

"It'd be a common bond," said Benjamin, "being made fools of by the same woman. When did you realize that it was she who was working things so that Mick would kill Bash?"

"Or vice versa. She didn't care which of them killed the other one. One would be dead. The other would go to the clink. And she'd be rid of them both. A neat idea, really."

"And when did you see through it?"

"Fairly soon," said Petrella. "The first time she showed me the fingerprint marks on her wrists. They didn't look like my idea of Bash's

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fingers—too long, too thin. When I saw his hands the next morning, the whole thing became quite impossible. He's got squat, thick fingers and he was wearing a couple of rings. If it'd been Bash who grabbed her wrists, you'd have seen the marks of those rings, and no mistake."

"Then who did it?"

"Leo, I'd guess," said Petrella. "And marked her face. It was quite a thorough frame-up. They missed out on one or two details, that's all. Like when she said that Bash had thrown his cup at her and broken the window. That couldn't have been true. The glass was all *inside* the room. I stepped in it when I went there the next morning. That's when I knew for certain that she was lying."

"What's Bash going to do next?" asked the Superintendent.

"The divisional boys in Camberwell say that he and Mick are to hold up a bank."

"Dangerous game," said Superintendent Benjamin.

"Not as dangerous as living with Mrs. Warrender," said Petrella, "Not by a long way."

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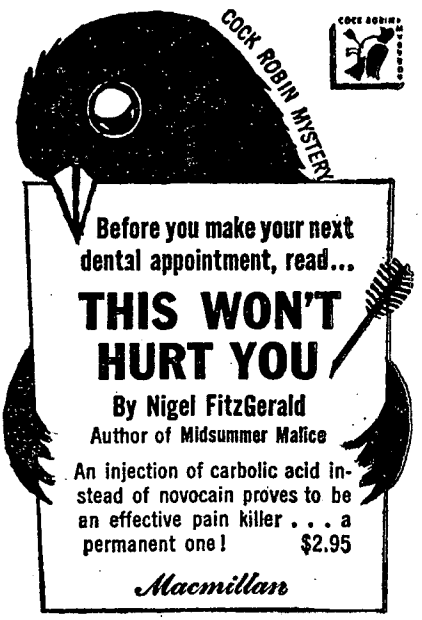

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARY MONTGOMERY**

TITLE: ***The Chipped Heart***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A story that has values in depth you will never suspect in the beginning—that tells how something lovely died—that will chip a piece off your own heart . . .*

THEY WANTED ME TO STAY, BUT I just couldn't. Not because there'd been a murder at JONCONN SERVICES, but because my heart was broken. Well, I've changed jobs three times since then; but, gee, I can still see Marian and me coming in and finding that body—and me getting that piece chipped off my heart, like my mother said I would . . .

Marian was the bookkeeper. She dressed very chick, mostly in black. She wasn't so old, twenty-eight, but she wore her hair pulled skin-tight back into a bun and her eyes looked tired. She'd been with Mr. Jonconn when he'd started his publicity business . . . *He* was about thirty-six when I went to work for him. He looked like a movie actor, the Latin Lover type—though his real name was John Cahn. Gee, he was clever, the things he thought up to get publicity for his accounts . . .

"You've had *four* jobs, Virginia, in the short time since you left high school?" Marian said when she interviewed me. He'd left it to her to hire a girl for the filing.

How could I explain? Seeing it was such a chick place and with only five people in it—including me, if I could get accepted—I was too anxious. I broke into a sweat. "It was—personal reasons." I got that much out; but nervousness made a buzzing in my ears so my voice sounded queer and far away to me. I told her I supported my mother and had to go where I could better myself financially.

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She smiled. It turned her into a real pretty girl, instead of just a chick type in a size ten suit of expensive style. "You'll like *us*," she said, as if she'd guessed the truth. "You'll work in this outer office with Helen and me. Helen," she nodded toward the taffy-color blonde across the room, "handles the switchboard, types the press releases. When Mr. Alling joined the firm he brought Helen." She whispered "They're engaged."

Marian showed me where to hang my things. My beret fell off the locker shelf. She picked it up. She must have noticed it was a cheap old thing, but she brushed it off for me. "If you're ready, Virginia," she said, "I'll take you inside so Mr. Jonconn can personally welcome you."

Gee, what if Mr. Jonconn will be disappointed in getting someone like me, and like how I'm dressed? If he'll just give me a chance—then whiz, we were in his office! Was he ever a doll! And he didn't just sit and grunt—he stood up, he shook hands, and said, "Glad to have you join our little family, Virginia. Speak up any time we aren't keeping you happy." A real prince.

But Marian knew him well enough to realize he wouldn't object to her hiring me. And she knew him well enough to say, "John—you thief, you!—that's my letter opener you're playing with again." She took it from him. It had a chick silver handle.

When we returned to our outside office Marian introduced Helen. I was feeling too good, I only noticed about Helen how beautiful she was. I mean, Marian had a face you'd love to look like—but Helen's you couldn't take your eyes off. She has black eyelashes as long as curtain fringe, almost. Gee, some figure too—not flat, like Marian's. Helen said, "Hi" and turned away, then Marian got me started working.

I worked till noontime. Then Mr. Jonconn came out and said, "I'm going down to grab a sandwich, girls." And Marian told me my lunch hour was twelve. So I put my things on and she said, "Where are your gloves? It's nippy weather, Virginia." When she saw I didn't have any she said, Good—because she had a pair at home she didn't wear or know what to do with.

When I went home that night my mother could see I'd clicked this time. But she asked me, "You like it, honey?" And I said to her, "I'm telling you it's heaven!" Then there was the meat and potatoes getting cold and the gravy getting a shine on top while I was telling about Marian's kindness, and His Highness the Prince, and the beauty of Helen. But I couldn't say anything about Mr. Alling because I hadn't met him. He'd been arrested that day for opening a barrel of monkeys in Times Square, which stopped traffic for a long time.

"You better eat your supper," my mother laughed. She's a heavy

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woman with bad feet, and a laugh like church music.

I'd started at Jonconn Services on a Tuesday. The next day, like she'd said, Marian brought me the gloves. They were black leather, the cuffs trimmed with white fur—expensive, like everything she bought. Gee, I thanked her so much she had to tell me to stop! But I only wore those gloves when leaving or coming in, I wanted to save them. Later you shall hear why.

On that same Wednesday another thing happened. I was cutting out and filing the releases Marian had marked in the morning papers. (She would read and mark the newspapers on her way to work—having been with Mr. Jonconn so long she was, like, married to his business.) And Marian was sorting the mail. In jazzed Helen and Mr. Alling. He was middle-height, young, scar-cheeked. He helped Helen off with her coat (a pale blue Dynel, the kind you see advertised for $95) and she said to him, "Doll, this is Virginia." So he and I said hello.

I didn't have much chance to make up my mind about him, he went to his own office after getting his mail from Marian. But Helen went to the locker, which is around by the filing cabinets, and because I was admiring her coat I happened to see what she did. She pushed my beret way back in the corner, which I guess was all right if she wanted to make room for her own hat—but then she wiped her hand off on her skirt. Like I was somebody dirty.

That was the only upset until in the afternoon. Then about 2:30 a bunch of midgets came for an appointment with Mr. Jonconn. Seven of them, they all had to be the same size because the outer-space costumes he'd ordered were that size. I was surprised the way Mr. Jonconn hollered at them and at Marian and Helen, when he found that one midget was bigger than the rest. (Later I got used to the way he would carry on at people sometimes. Nobody seemed to mind it. They'd just let him holler himself out and he'd get a new idea before he was through. He was a clever man.) But when all was quiet again, Marian came over and asked, Was I crying or did I have a cold?

I told her, "It was just the excitement."

"My goodness," she said, "you mustn't mind Mr. Jonconn! Don't you know the whole world's his circus?"

I thought about that and began to wonder if that was why he was willing I should have this job. Because, to him, I was funny? But mother said, "Honey, tuck your heart inside you . . ."

There isn't too much to tell. I was accepted by one and all. If Helen never got real friendly, well, I saw she couldn't care for anybody except herself. (Even Mr. Alling, all she cared about was having him spend money on her. She'd tell us girls, Dickie bought me this, Dickie

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took me somewhere swell last night.) Maybe a beautiful person doesn't have to care, any more than the Christmas tree at Radio City has to, you still enjoy looking . . .

Well, I worked there nearly two months. I bought a little white hat with a veil. It was like the hat Marian wore with her black fur coat, that's why. I'd been saving my gloves so I could wear them with it —only I couldn't wear it yet, not with my plastic jacket, so I couldn't wear the gloves yet either.

Then one morning right under our noses (Marian's and mine—Mr. Jonconn wasn't in yet) Helen picked a fight with Mr. Alling, breaking their engagement. He sat quiet a while on Marian's desk. Then he took that chick letter opener of Marian's (which she'd just gone and got from Mr. Jonconn's office—he was always walking off with it, Mr. Jonconn). And Mr. Alling stood up, saying, "Helen, I should run this through your heart. Or whatever a gold-digger calls her heart."

But he put it down and Marian started opening mail with it. He went toward his own office. Helen screamed, "There's your lousy engagement ring!" She threw it at him. He stooped for the ring. I saw his face. He looked like he could kill Helen.

So I began to wonder about Mr. Alling. I'd never before had any feeling about him at all (though my mother says I'm too quick at loving everybody). He and myself were, like, running on different tracks. Anyhow he wasn't someone you'd think about like Mr. Jonconn was. I mean, to be able to watch Mr. Jonconn was like you had a ticket for an exciting show.

This break-off of the engagement had happened on a Monday, the first thing Monday morning. It was the beginning of the end, but I didn't know. And when I went out to lunch I bought a hot dog and gave the man a fifty-cent piece and never noticed until I was half a block from 42nd Street that he'd given me a Canadian dime in change.

When you've been poor all your life and there's bills to be paid, I guess things like that seem worse than they would to other people. Or it wouldn't matter so much if you looked important and could go back and tell the man he gave you that bum dime and he'd *believe* you. Or, if you looked important, you'd know he hadn't passed it off on you because he guessed you'd be ashamed to come back at him.

Well, I returned from lunch. Usually I took a walk, but not today. Though I liked just walking into that big building with its three entrances, its long rows of elevators, its polished marble hall. Crowds of chick people were always walking to and fro; but at lunch time you should see the secretaries how they were dressed, like Park Avenue no less. And nobody ever looked at

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me like I didn't belong there, all were too busy squeezing through the crowd. Anyhow, I made up my mind I'd soon buy a black coat so I could wear my new hat and the gloves.

I was early today, but after standing around a while downstairs I went on up. Marian was out to lunch, it was still her time. At twelve I'd go out—then, maybe five minutes after, she'd get ready. So Marian would return at five or ten minutes past one; then she'd take over the switchboard and Helen would go to lunch.

As to Mr. Alling and Mr. Jonconn, they'd be in and out all day. But Mr. Alling always got there around nine A.M., Mr. Jonconn never before ten, and then between a quarter of twelve and one o'clock (unless he had an appointment outside) he'd say, "Guess I'll go down and grab a sandwich."

That's one thing I tried explaining later to the police—that Helen could be alone in the office or not, during the hour Marian and I were out. She could be alone fifteen or thirty minutes while Mr. Jonconn was grabbing his sandwich, or longer if he'd made an appointment to eat with someone, or not at all if Mr. Alling happened to be in from twelve to one.

Well, on this Monday, I went into Jonconn Services and saw Helen wasn't at her desk. She was in Mr. Jonconn's office. I could see his and her outlines through the frosted glass partition—the light was on. But there was no light on in Mr. Alling's office, so I guessed he was still out since about ten thirty. I got to work, fast, over in my corner. (When I told my mother—not Monday night, but on Friday late—she said I should have beat it. But, see, I was confused.)

Well, after a while the switchboard began making a noise so Helen came to answer it. Then she started to fix herself ready to go to lunch. She didn't speak to me. Then Mr. Jonconn hung up his phone and came out front.

"Oh, Virginia's back!" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Jonconn," I said.

"She was back early," Helen said.

It's funny how all those words meant different from what they seem. They meant—

Was Virginia here when—?

Yes, Mr. Jonconn. I'm sorry.

Wouldn't you know Virginia'd be sneaking around when she's not wanted!

"You look like a thundercloud, Virginia," he said. I saw he didn't mean it to hurt my feelings. Even when he hollered at people it wasn't to hurt them. He was a person who preferred to have you like him. (But if you were bad for his business he would get rid of you regardless.)

"A man shoved a Canadian dime on me," I said.

"Is *that* all?" He threw back his head and laughed.

Well, I'm telling you, I couldn't

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help grinning myself when it was such a joke to him. But with me, what I was grinning at was him—because it was a real pleasure watching him, a big handsome man who was meant to enjoy himself. And just then the door opened and Marian came from lunch. He had to tell her what he was laughing about—me and my great trouble!

But Marian said, "Let me see the dime, Virginia." So I got it out of my wallet. "I'll keep it. For luck." She smiled and dropped it into her pocketbook and made me take a good dime of hers. Honest, there was nothing I could do to make her take hers back.

And she'd been shopping—she showed the new cups and saucers she'd bought out of her own salary for our coffee break. They were real pretty, white china crimped all around like a frill. There were five, you know. If there'd been only four, I'd have understood . . . Yet it was that night my mother said to me, when we were talking, "You've got too much heart for one little girl, honey. You'll get a piece chipped off it before you're through."

It was the day after that, when I stayed out my full lunch time on purpose, that when I got back Marian was already there and had come back early for her. She wasn't in the office—just her wet umbrella was in the locker, but not her other things. And I went to the Ladies' Room, and that's where Marian was.

"Did Mr. Jonconn go yet?" she asked.

"Yes, he just took the down elevator. I guess he's grabbing his sandwich."

She snapped her compact closed and went to relieve Helen at the switchboard.

Helen passed me in the hall. She was humming to herself, halfway smiling. But inside our office all was quiet. Marian was sitting with her head on her arms.

"You got a headache, honey?" I asked my friend.

"No," she looked up. "Just tired."

I knew what was what.

Then she asked if I'd had a good lunch. I told her, Yes, a frank and hot chocolate.

"That's a good lunch?" she smiled.

"It's the same I always have."

"At a counter? You come with me tomorrow. My treat."

Gee, I was dying to go with her. But it didn't seem right she should pay for me, like I needed charity. So I thought, I don't need that coat yet a while.

When I told my mother what was going to be, she said, "I guess that office *is* heaven, honey." She pressed my Sunday dress, it's navy taffeta—she wouldn't let me do it myself.

This restaurant where we went, Bellefonti's, runs through from one block to the next. There's two front entrances, but on different streets, with a cashier at each entrance. Walking around during my lunch

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times I used to read the menu they pasted on the windows—a new menu each day and everything very expensive.

They gave us a table with one chair, and against the wall a divan which Marian said for me to sit on and see everything.

My bill came to a dollar sixty-five —though I had the cheapest thing I could find, spaghetti with mushroom sauce. Marian's was lots more. (Also, she had a cocktail—she always did, she said. But I knew my mother wouldn't have liked me to.) And from the time we sat down till when we got up, we were our whole hour in there.

Well, when the waitress put down our checks Marian took both. I reached for mine, but she got it first. She laughed, getting it away from me so smart. Then I laughed too when she dropped it on the floor, I thought I'd get it after all.

But I looked, and she was looking, and it wasn't there. Marian had to get the waitress back, have her write what I owed onto the other with what Marian owed. Anyhow, I dropped my dollar sixty-five into Marian's bag when she opened it at the cashier's window. (Naturally, I had to pay my own. Otherwise it would have been like her dime and the gloves she gave me.)

Mr. Jonconn wanted a contract from my files that afternoon. It wasn't where I'd put it. I told him somebody must have taken it out, maybe Mr. Alling had wished to read it. We went and looked in Mr. Alling's empty office. It wasn't there.

Mr. Jonconn began hollering at me. It was awful and I was scared —he was very big, very loud and angry. Yet I was happy, because I could see that to him I wasn't different from Marian and Helen. What I mean, before this I'd wondered if to him I was like a little dog that was trained to do tricks but you wouldn't expect too much from it.

So this gave me courage to say, If I couldn't find his contract in my files it wasn't there. Well, he went into his office and slammed the door. Soon Helen came from lunch, though. He sent her to my files to find that contract, which she did. I think now, Helen had hidden it while I was out with Marian. I think she wanted him to fire me because I'd come back early on Monday.

And it's funny he didn't fire me, because he was a man that was handsome and a wonderful gentleman, but he would never stand for anything that could upset his business. Though he was very clever too, so maybe he knew it was Helen.

Anyway, around five when we girls were getting our things on, I I said to Helen, "I'm not somebody who wants to make trouble. Do you think I am?"

"Just see that you don't," she said. She looked very beautiful, except her hair needed touching up at the

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part. She was going to the hairdresser's on leaving. I suppose it's a good thing she did, she'd have wanted to look nice in her coffin.

It didn't happen until Friday, the murder. But Thursday night my mother dreamed of death—so you'd think I'd have known what was to be, but I didn't.

Friday morning Mr. Alling said he would check on the midgets Mr. Jonconn had sent to fly over people's heads in a saucer, in front of the Plaza Hotel—they were to start flying at noon. (Mr. Alling said it to Marian, he wasn't speaking to Helen nowadays.)

So he went out before eleven, and I didn't see him again until the police brought him in. At eleven Mr. Jonconn came to work. Right after that a lady with three arms came in, wanting to talk to him. Helen told her no, the deal was off. That lady told Helen she'd better not get smart with her or Helen wouldn't stay pretty. So Helen plugged in Mr. Jonconn's office and I guess he said get rid of that lady—because Helen then told her he was all tied up.

"Tied up, is he? Hanging, I hope!" that lady said. She had expected to be one of his publicity stunts, but he'd changed his mind. When Helen phoned him that the coast was clear he came out and said to us, "This isn't an office, it's a lunatic asylum. I must have been crazy to go into this business." (That was one of his regular sayings, the same as, "I'm going down to grab a sandwich, girls.")

Then he went into his office again and that was the last I saw of him until the police brought him up from grabbing his sandwich. I told the police all these things . . .

I went downstairs at twelve as usual. And I didn't come back early. It was too cold for taking a walk, though. After I'd eaten I stood inside watching people go in and out through the revolving doors of the Fifth Avenue entrance. Finally I saw Marian's white hat, that I now had one like at home, and I waited and we went up in the elevator together. It turned out the clock in the lobby had been three minutes slow, so I was five minutes over my time by Marian's watch.

Marian said she'd had a good lunch at Bellefonti's and we must go there together again. But she said, "Remember that Canadian dime of yours I was keeping for luck? Well, it got mixed with my change and I gave it to the cashier today. So embarrassing!" She wouldn't swap it back, though. She said maybe it would bring her luck yet.

Then we were at our door. I was the one who opened it—I was the one who let out that scream they heard across the hall. Helen was lying dead on the floor, with the letter opener in her chest, and everywhere was blood.

"Who could have done this?" Marian cried. She gently shook me.

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I stopped screaming. I wanted to be a real lady like Marian, even if I wasn't so brave. But I hid my face in the shoulder of her black fur coat.

People were crowding into our doorway. She told them to get the police. She told one man to come while she looked into the two inside offices. The lights were out in Mr. Alling's and Mr. Jonconn's offices, but what if someone had come and killed everybody? I couldn't stand to think about Mr. Jonconn being murdered too, he was so handsome and clever—or even Mr. Alling, whom I'd never got to know much.

Well, Marian and the man came back—no more of us had been murdered it turned out. So I felt some better. I took newspapers from the wastebasket and laid them over Helen. (When the police came, and the medical examiner, they said I shouldn't have done it. But she used to be so beautiful, she wouldn't have liked everyone seeing her the way she was now.)

There isn't much more to tell that you don't know.

When the police had put out all but Marian and me, a plain-clothesman asked Marian, "What's that little girl do here?"

"Virginia does our filing," she said.

Then I was sure I was going to be arrested. Another detective—his name was Davis—looked funny at me and came over and asked me a lot of questions. I was nervous, the buzzing came into my ears, but I did my best to answer. I answered as to where I'd been and what different times we all would go out. I had to tell the truth, though I didn't want to get anyone in trouble.

Marian explained I didn't know anything about the murder—that I'd left before she had and she'd gone at ten after twelve. Mr. Jonconn, she said, would tell them that when she left the office Helen was still alive.

Well, they asked her where she'd been from ten after twelve until five after one when she and I came in together. She told them Bellefonti's. At first they didn't believe it took so long to eat there, but I told them it did. And she told them what she had to eat, what it cost, and that the cashier would remember her because of a Canadian dime.

They sent a man to speak to that cashier, but I think they believed Marian already, though I don't know if they believed me, that I'd been hanging around downstairs most of my time.

I went and stood by the window. It had started snowing, real hard. I felt like those big white flakes were smothering me, even though they were outside and I was in. And I was very sad, because you can "love thy neighbor as thyself" but it doesn't make thy neighbor love you as thy neighbor's self.

A patrolman brought in Mr. Jonconn. Mr. Jonconn acted dazed. He said he'd last seen Helen when

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he left at 12:50 to grab a sandwich. She was then alive and happy, and there was no one else with her.

"Cut it out, Cahn!" Detective Davis said. "You don't think you've got an alibi, do you? You admit you were alone with her forty minutes. This blonde was a dish. You trying to tell us there was never anything between you?"

"I didn't kill her," he said. But Mr. Jonconn took a quick glance at me. The detective noticed. I shook my head like I didn't know anything. Mr. Jonconn was a wonderful man—he was handsome even with his face a sick yellowish. I told myself, Don't let them get it out of you what you saw that day you came back too early from lunch. But my heart was breaking . . .

Then Marian said, blushing, "I've been John Cahn's sweetheart nine years. There was never anything between him and Helen. In fact, she'd been engaged—"

"To whom?" they asked her.

"I—don't know. But I remember something now—a freak, a woman, threatened Helen today."

They got that lady's address from my files.

Then two more policemen came in with Mr. Alling, who was known to one and all because of the monkeys in Times Square which is in that precinct. The two said, "We caught him downstairs. He says he's been up near the Plaza Hotel watching a flying saucer full of space-men."

Well, some of the police already knew what had happened there. The seven little people in their green costumes and goggles had been flying low about twenty minutes—they got a late start but it was from 12:25 until 12:45. Hundreds of people saw them, six people had fainted, and one woman had her baby born prematurely there because of it.

The patrolmen up at 59th and Fifth had had their hands full. No one had noticed Mr. Alling there, though. He knew it and admitted it—he said he'd tried not to be conspicuous as he hadn't wanted to be arrested for the midgets the same as for the monkeys. Therefore he had no alibi either. It was looking bad for him. He could have come back and stabbed Helen, like he'd once spoke of doing (but of course Marian and I kept his words secret).

Well, we were all taken to police headquarters. The lady with three arms, she was brought too. And they took us one by one to be questioned. They left me till last. It was nearly five o'clock. I wished I was dead.

Then I was taken into a room.

"Listen, Virginia," Detective Davis said, "I know from your face that you're keeping something back."

I broke into a sweat like I do when I'm nervous. There was that buzzing in my ears which makes my own voice sound all fuzzy to me, so I didn't answer. He got mad

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at me and spoke louder. Then I began to cry, I couldn't help it.

I was bawling like a baby and I thought, Why couldn't they arrest that glass partition that caused it all? Because when the light was on in Mr. Jonconn's office and two people were inside there, you could tell from the other side what they were doing. I saw on Monday, that's why Helen wanted me fired, that's why on Tuesday I stayed out my full time and when Marian got back before I did.

"Here," Detective Davis said, giving me his handkerchief. "Anyone can see you're a good girl I'm not trying to scare you, child—"

Gee, he spoke so fatherly, before I knew it I was saying things I never meant to. "It's n-not because I'm scared," I sobbed, "it's because she took me to Bellefonti's only to get my ch-check for one sixty-five—" Then I realized I'd said it out loud —but honest, I could hardly hear my own voice.

I wouldn't say another word. Still, I guess those detectives are pretty smart. Of course when Marian told she'd eaten spaghetti there and paid the cashier one sixty-five, that's when my heart began to break like my mother knew it would sooner or later. Because Marian always bought the most expensive. And what about her cocktail? And anyhow, I'd looked at the menu in the window and there was no spaghetti Friday.

But I suppose Marian's admitting she and Mr. Jonconn had been sweethearts, that made Detective Davis realize she'd be jealous of anyone so beautiful as Helen. Still, I didn't tell him what I'd seen, or that I knew Marian had seen it on Tuesday.

What hurt me so, and still does, is that she asked me to go to Bellefonti's only after she'd made up her mind to kill Helen. She didn't ask me for *me*—it wasn't loving thy neighbor as thyself and wanting to eat with thy neighbor. She figured, once she got that extra check (which she pretended we'd lost under the table) then whenever a day came that Mr. Jonconn and Mr. Alling were both out so Helen was alone—which Marian could stay in the hall and watch for—it would be simple as mush to slip back and put that sharp letter opener into Helen.

Who would notice what time Marian left that building? And it didn't matter if she had to wait until 12:50 because anyone who had a meal check could go in one entrance of Bellefonti's and walk through the restaurant and pay the cashier at the opposite entrance—just as if it was after spending an hour in that crowded dining-room.

But she *did* give me her good dime for my bad one before she had an idea she would use mine to make the cashier remember her. And she gave me her gloves with the white fur on them, which I was saving to wear with my new

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white hat. But I never wore that hat—gee, I couldn't bear to.

After she'd confessed and all, Mr. Jonconn wanted me to keep my job. To him the world was his circus, he liked you all right if you weren't bad for his business. He couldn't feel love himself, although he was a man whom women would always be crazy about—he was clever, handsome and wonderful.

But it was Marian, my friend, had made that place seem like heaven to me—until I found she too had her circus, though smaller than Mr. Jonconn's, and though she was kind to her animal, which was me.

So I couldn't stay on there, I just couldn't, not because I'm a colored girl but because something lovely had died . . .

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Richard Harding Davis's IN THE FOG *is acknowledged by most critics to be one of the detective-mystery-crime classics of the early 20th century. Although published as a book, it is really a series of three connected and intertwined short stories; but since the second story constitutes merely a sort of "delaying action" and is not wholly relevant to the main plot, we have decided to omit this middle section and give you the first and third parts judiciously divided into three installments.*

IN THE FOG *was first published in book form by R. H. Russell in 1901. It is a handsome thin volume, printed on thick paper, and profusely illustrated by Thomas Mitchell Peirce and Frederic Dorr Steele (the latter the greatest of all Sherlockian illustrators); there is supposed to be a simultaneous thin-paper first edition, but in more than a quarter of a century of book collecting we have never laid eyes on a copy. The first edition in the Ellery Queen Collection (now at the University of Texas in Austin) was exceptional—it contained a most interesting inscription by the author. The text used by your Editors for EQMM was formerly the Vincent Starrett copy, with one of his Sherlockian bookplates on the inside front cover and his swashbuckling signature on the half title.*

If you have never read IN THE FOG, *you have an old-fashioned treat in store. "The Golden Book Magazine," of beloved memory, said in 1930 that Richard Harding Davis should be as famous for* IN THE FOG *as for his better known stories, and described* IN THE FOG *as "an enthralling murder yarn told swiftly, and with an ending which we guarantee to be utterly unexpected."*

If you have read IN THE FOG, *however long ago, we envy you the thrill and excitement of rediscovering a grand old tale of suspense and surprise.*

SERIAL

IN THE FOG *(Part One)*

by RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

THE GRILL IS THE CLUB MOST DIFficult of access in the world. To be placed on its rolls distinguishes the new member as greatly as though he had received a vacant Garter or had been caricatured in *Vanity Fair.*

Men who belong to the Grill

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Club never mention the fact. If you were to ask one of them which clubs he frequents, he will name all save that particular one. He is afraid if he told you he belonged to the Grill that it would sound like boasting.

The Grill Club dates back to the days when Shakespeare's Theatre stood on the present site of the *Times* office. It has a golden Grill which Charles the Second presented to the Club, and the original manuscript of *Tom and Jerry in London,* which was bequeathed to it by Pierce Egan himself. The members, when they write letters at the Club, still use sand to blot the ink.

The Grill enjoys the distinction of having blackballed, without political prejudice, a Prime Minister of each party. At the same sitting at which one of these fell, it elected, on account of his brogue and his bulls, Quiller, Q. C., who was then a penniless barrister.

When Paul Preval, the French artist who came to London by royal command to paint a portrait of the Prince of Wales, was made an honorary member—only foreigners may be honorary members—he said, as he signed his first wine card, "I would rather see my name there than on a Louvre picture."

At which Quiller remarked, "That is a devil of a compliment, because the only men who can read their names in the Louvre today have been dead fifty years."

On the night after the great fog of 1897 there were five members in the Club, four of them busy with supper and one reading in front of the fireplace. There is only one room to the Club, and one long table. At the far end of the room the fire of the grill glows red, and, when the fat falls, blazes into flame, and at the other there is a broad bow window of diamond panes, which looks down upon the street.

The four men at the table were strangers to each other, but as they picked at the grilled bones and sipped their scotch and soda, they conversed with such charming animation that a visitor to the Club, which does not tolerate visitors, would have counted them as friends of long acquaintance, certainly not as Englishmen who had met for the first time and without the form of an introduction. But it is the etiquette and tradition of the Grill that whoever enters it must speak with whomever he finds there. It is to enforce this rule that there is but one long table, and whether there are twenty men at it or two, the waiters, supporting the rule, will place them side by side.

For this reason the four strangers at supper were seated together, with the candles grouped about them, and the long length of the table cutting a white path through the outer gloom.

"I repeat," said the gentleman with the black pearl stud, "that the

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days for romantic adventure and deeds of foolish daring have passed, and that the fault lies with ourselves. Voyages to the pole I do not catalogue as adventures. That African explorer, young Chetney, who turned up yesterday after he was supposed to have died in Uganda, did nothing adventurous. He made maps and explored the sources of rivers. He was in constant danger, but the presence of danger does not constitute adventure. Were that so, the chemist who studies high explosives, or who investigates deadly poisons, passes through adventures daily.

"No, 'adventures are for the adventurous.' But one no longer ventures. The spirit of it has died of inertia. We are grown too practical, and above all, too sensible. In this room, for instance, members of this Club have, at the sword's point, disputed the proper scanning of one of Pope's couplets. Over so weighty a matter as spilled Burgundy on a gentleman's cuff, ten men fought across this table, each with his rapier in one hand and a candle in the other. All ten were wounded. The question of the spilled Burgundy concerned but two of them. The eight others engaged because they were men of 'spirit.' They were, indeed, the first gentlemen of the day.

"Tonight, were you to spill Burgundy on my cuff, were you even to insult me grossly, these gentlemen would not consider it incumbent upon them to kill each other. They would separate us, and tomorrow morning appear as witnesses against us at Bow Street. We have here tonight, in the persons of Sir Andrew and myself, an illustration of how the ways have changed."

The men around the table turned and glanced toward the gentleman in front of the fireplace. He was an elderly and somewhat portly person, with a kindly, wrinkled countenance, which wore continually a smile of almost childish confidence and good-nature. It was a face which the illustrated prints had made intimately familiar. He held a book from him at arm's-length, as if to adjust his eyesight, and his brows were knit with interest.

"Now, were this the eighteenth century," continued the gentleman with the black pearl, "when Sir Andrew left the Club tonight I would have him bound and gagged and thrown into a sedan chair. The watch would not interfere, the passers-by would take to their heels, my hired bullies and ruffians would convey him to some lonely spot where we would guard him until morning. Nothing would come of it, except added reputation to myself as a gentleman of adventurous spirit, and possibly an essay in the *Tatler*, wits stars for names, entitled, let us say, 'The Budget and the Baronet.'"

"But to what end, sir?" inquired the youngest of the members. "And

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why Sir Andrew, of all persons—why should you select him for this adventure?"

The gentleman with the black pearl shrugged.

"It would prevent him speaking in the House tonight. The Navy Increase Bill," he added gloomily. "It is a Government measure, and Sir Andrew speaks for it. And so great is his influence and so large his following that if he does"—the gentleman laughed ruefully—"if he does, it will go through. Now, had I the spirit of our ancestors," he exclaimed, "I would bring chloroform from the nearest chemist's and drug him in that chair. I would tumble his unconscious form into a hansom cab and hold him prisoner until daylight. If I did, I would save the British taxpayer the cost of five more battleships, many millions of pounds."

The gentlemen again turned, and surveyed the baronet with freshened interest. The honorary member of the Grill, whose accent already had betrayed him as an American, laughed softly.

"To look at him now," he said, "one would not guess he was deeply concerned with the affairs of state."

The others nodded silently.

"He has not lifted his eyes from that book since we first entered," added the youngest member. "He surely cannot mean to speak tonight."

"Oh, yes, he will speak," muttered the one with the black pearl moodily. "During these last hours of the session the House sits late, but when the Navy bill comes up on its third reading he will be in his place—and he will pass it."

The fourth member, a stout and florid gentleman of a somewhat sporting appearance, in a short smoking-jacket and black tie, sighed enviously.

"Fancy one of us being as cool as that if he knew he had to stand up within an hour and rattle off a speech in Parliament. I'd be in a devil of a funk myself. And yet he is as keen over that book he's reading as though he had nothing before him until bedtime.

"Yes, see how eager he is," whispered the youngest member. "He does not lift his eyes even now when he cuts the pages. It is probably an Admiralty Report or some other weighty work of statistics which bears upon his speech."

The gentleman with the black pearl laughed morosely.

"The weighty work in which the eminent statesman is so deeply engrossed," he said, "is called *The Great Rand Robbery*. It is a detective novel, for sale at all bookstalls."

The American raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

"The Great Rand Robbery?" he repeated incredulously. "What an odd taste!"

"It is not a taste, it is his vice," returned the gentleman with the

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pearl stud. "It is his one dissipation. He is noted for it. You, as a stranger, could hardly be expected to know of this idiosyncrasy. Mr. Gladstone sought relaxation in the Greek poets, Sir Andrew finds his in Gaboriau. Since I have been a member of the Parliament I have never seen him in the library without a shilling shocker in his hands. He brings them even into the sacred precincts of the House, and from the Government benches reads them concealed inside his hat. Once started on a tale of murder, robbery, and sudden death, nothing can tear him from it, not even the call of the division bell, nor of hunger, nor the prayers of the party Whip.

"He gave up his country house because when he journeyed to it in the train he would become so absorbed in his detective stories that he was invariably carried past his station." The member of Parliament twisted his pearl stud nervously, and bit at the edge of his mustache. "If it only were the first pages of *The Great Rand Robbery* that he were reading," he murmured bitterly, "instead of the last! With such another book as that, I swear I could hold him here until morning. There would be no need of chloroform to keep him from the House."

The eyes of all were fastened upon Sir Andrew, and each saw with fascination that with his forefinger he was now separating the last two pages of the book. The member of Parliament struck the table softly with his open palm.

"I would give a hundred pounds," he whispered, "if I could place in his hands at this moment a new story of Sherlock Holmes—a thousand pounds," he added wildly— "five thousand pounds!"

The American observed the speaker sharply, as though the words bore to him some special application, and then at an idea which apparently had but just come to him, smiled in great embarrassment.

Sir Andrew ceased reading but, as though still under the influence of the book, sat looking blankly into the open fire. For a brief space no one moved until the baronet withdrew his eyes and, with a sudden start of recollection, felt anxiously for his watch. He scanned it and scrambled to his feet.

The voice of the American instantly broke the silence in a high, nervous accent.

"And yet Sherlock Holmes himself," he cried, "could not decipher the mystery which tonight baffles the police of London."

At these unexpected words, which carried in them something of the tone of a challenge, the gentlemen about the table started as suddenly as though the American had fired a pistol in the air, and Sir Andrew halted abruptly and stood observing him with grave surprise.

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The gentleman with the black pearl was the first to recover.

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly. "A mystery that baffles the police of London. I have heard nothing of it. Tell us at once, pray do—tell us at once."

The American flushed uncomfortably, and picked uneasily at the tablecloth.

"No one but the police has heard of it," he murmured, "and they only through me. It is a remarkable crime to which, unfortunately I am the only person who can bear witness. Because I am the only witness, I am, in spite of my immunity as a diplomat, detained in London by the authorities of Scotland Yard. My name," he said, inclining his head politely, "is Sears, Lieutenant Ripley Sears of the United States Navy, at present Naval Attaché to the Court of Russia. Had I not been detained today by the police I would have started this morning for Saint Petersburg."

The gentleman with the black pearl interrupted with so pronounced an exclamation of excitement and delight that the American stammered and ceased speaking.

"Do you hear, Sir Andrew?" cried the member of Parliament jubilantly. "An American diplomat halted by our police because he is the only witness of a most remarkable crime—*the* most remarkable crime, I believe you said, sir," he added bending eagerly toward the naval officer, "which has occurred in London in many years."

The American moved his head in assent and glanced at the two other members. They were looking doubtfully at him, and the face of each showed that he was greatly perplexed.

Sir Andrew advanced to within the light of the candles and drew a chair toward him.

"The crime must be exceptional indeed," he said, "to justify the police in interfering with a representative of a friendly power. If I were not forced to leave at once, I should take the liberty of asking you to tell us the details."

The gentleman with the pearl pushed the chair toward Sir Andrew and motioned him to be seated.

"You cannot leave us now," he exclaimed. "Mr. Sears is just about to tell us of this remarkable crime."

He nodded vigorously at the naval officer and the American, after first glancing doubtfully toward the servants at the far end of the room, leaned forward across the table. The others drew their chairs nearer and bent toward him. The baronet glanced irresolutely at his watch, and with an exclamation of annoyance snapped down the lid. "They can wait," he murmured. He seated himself quickly and nodded at Lieutenant Sears.

"If you will be so kind as to begin, sir," he said impatiently.

"Of course," said the American,

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"you understand that I understand that I am speaking to gentlemen. The confidences of this Club are inviolate. Until the police give the facts to the public press, I must consider you my confederates. You have heard nothing, you know no one connected with this mystery. Even I must remain anonymous."

The gentlemen seated around him nodded gravely.

"Of course," the baronet assented with eagerness, "of course."

"We will refer to it," said the gentleman with the black pearl, "as 'The Story of the Naval Attaché.'"

"I arrived in London two days ago," said the American, "and I engaged a room at the Bath Hotel. I know very few people in London, and even the members of our embassy were strangers to me. But in Hongkong I had become great pals with an officer in your navy, who has since retired and who is now living in a small house in Rutland Gardens opposite the Knightsbridge barracks. I telegraphed him that I was in London, and yesterday morning I received a most hearty invitation to dine with him the same evening at his house. He is a bachelor so we dined alone and talked over all our old days on the Asiatic Station and of the changes which had come to us since we had last met there. As I was leaving the next morning for my post at Saint Petersburg and had many letters to write, I told him, about ten o'clock, that I must get back to the hotel, and he sent out his servant to call a hansom.

"For the next quarter of an hour, as we sat talking, we could hear the cab whistle sounding violently from the doorstep, but apparently with no result.

"'It cannot be that the cabmen are on strike,' my friend said, as he rose and walked to the window.

"He pulled back the curtains and at once called to me.

"'You have never seen a London fog, have you?' he asked. 'Well, come here. This is one of the best, or, rather, one of the worst, of them.' I joined him at the window, but I could see nothing. Had I not known that the house looked out upon the street I would have believed that I was facing a dead wall. I raised the sash and stretched out my head, but still I could see nothing. Even the light of the street lamps opposite, and in the upper windows of the barracks, had been smothered in the yellow mist. The lights of the room in which I stood penetrated the fog only to the distance of a few inches from my eyes.

"Below me the servant was still sounding his whistle, but I could afford to wait no longer, and told my friend that I would try and find the way to my hotel on foot. He objected, but the letters I had to write were for the Navy Department and, besides, I had always heard that to be out in a London fog was the most wonderful experi-

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ence, and I was curious to investigate one for myself.

"My friend went with me to his front door and laid down a course for me to follow. I was first to walk straight across the street to the brick wall of the Knightsbridge Barracks. I was then to feel my way along the wall until I came to a row of houses set back from the sidewalk. They would bring me to a cross street. On the other side of this street was a row of shops which I was to follow until they joined the iron railings of Hyde Park. I was to keep to the railings until I reached the gates at Hyde Park Corner, where I was to lay a diagonal course across Piccadilly, and tack in toward the railings of Green Park. At the end of these railings going east, I would find the Walsingham, and my own hotel.

"To a sailor the course did not seem difficult, so I bade my friend good night and walked forward until my feet touched the paving. I continued upon it until I reached the curbing of the sidewalk. A few steps farther and my hands struck the wall of the barracks. I turned in the direction from which I had just come and saw a square of faint light cut in the yellow fog. I shouted 'All right,' and the voice of my friend answered, 'Good luck to you.' The light from his open door disappeared with a bang and I was left alone in a dripping, yellow darkness.

"I have been in the Navy for ten years, but I have never known such a fog as that of last night, not even among the icebergs of Bering Sea. There one at least could see the light of the binnacle, but last night I could not even distinguish the hand by which I guided myself along the barrack wall. At sea a fog is a natural phenomenon. It is as familiar as the rainbow which follows a storm; it is as proper that a fog should spread upon the waters as that steam shall rise from a kettle. But a fog which springs from the paved streets, that rolls between solid house fronts, that forces cabs to move at half speed, that drowns policemen and extinguishes the electric lights of the music hall, that to me is incomprehensible. It is as out of place as a tidal wave on Broadway.

"As I felt my way along the wall I encountered other men coming from the opposite direction, and each time when we hailed each other I stepped away from the wall to make room for them to pass. But the third time I did this, when I reached out my hand, the wall had disappeared, and the farther I moved to find it the farther I seemed to be sinking into space. I had the unpleasant conviction that at any moment I might step over a precipice.

"Since I had set out I had heard no traffic in the street, and now, although I listened some minutes, I could only distinguish the occasional footfalls of pedestrians. Sev-

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eral times I called aloud, and once a jocular gentleman answered me, but only to ask me where I thought he was, and then even he was swallowed up in the silence. Just above me I could make out a jet of gas which I guessed came from a street lamp, and I moved over to that, and while I tried to recover my bearings, kept my hand on the iron post. Except for this flicker of gas, no larger than the tip of my finger, I could distinguish nothing about me. For the rest, the mist hung between me and the world like a damp, and heavy blanket.

"I could hear voices, but I could not tell from whence they came, and the scrape of a foot moving cautiously, or a muffled cry as someone stumbled, were the only sounds that reached me.

"I decided that until someone took me in tow I had best remain where I was, and it must have been for ten minutes that I waited by the lamp, straining my ears and hailing distant footfalls. In a house near me some people were dancing to the music of a Hungarian band. I even fancied I could hear the windows shake to the rhythm of their feet, but I could not make out from which part of the compass the sounds came. And sometimes, as the music rose, it seemed close at my hand, and again, to be floating high in the air above my head.

"Although I was surrounded by thousands of householders, I was as completely lost as though I had been set down by night in the Sahara Desert.

"There seemed to be no reason in waiting longer for an escort, so I again set out and at once bumped against a low iron fence. At first I believed this to be an area railing, but on following it I found that it stretched for a long distance and that it was pierced at regular intervals with gates. I was standing uncertainly with my hand on one of these when a square of light suddenly opened in the night, and in it I saw, as you see a picture thrown on a screen in a darkened theatre, a young gentleman in evening dress, and back of him the lights of a hall.

"I guessed from its elevation and distance from the sidewalk that this light must come from the door of a house set back from the street, and I determined to approach it and ask the young man to tell me where I was. But in fumbling with the lock of the gate I instinctively bent my head, and when I raised it again the door had partly closed, leaving only a narrow shaft of light. Whether the young man had re-entered the house, or had left it I could not tell, but I hastened to open the gate, and as I stepped forward I found myself upon an asphalt walk. At the same instant there was the sound of quick steps upon the path, and someone rushed past me. I called on him, but he made no reply and I heard the gate click and the

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footsteps hurrying away upon the sidewalk.

"Under other circumstances the young man's rudeness, and his recklessness in dashing so hurriedly through the mist, would have struck me as peculiar, but everything was so distorted by the fog that at the moment I did not consider it. The door was still as he had left it, partly open. I went up the path and after much fumbling found the knob of the doorbell and gave it a sharp pull. The bell answered me from a great depth and distance, but no movement followed from inside the house, and although I pulled the bell again and again, I could hear nothing save the dripping of the mist about me.

"I was anxious to be on my way, but unless I knew where I was going there was little chance of my making any speed, and I was determined that until I learned my bearings I would not venture back into the fog. So I pushed the door open and stepped into the house.

"I found myself in a long and narrow hall upon which doors opened from either side. At the end of the hall was a staircase with a balustrade which ended in a sweeping curve. The balustrade was covered with heavy Persian rugs and the walls of the hall were also hung with them. The door on my left was closed but the one nearer me on the right was open, and as I stepped opposite to it I saw that it was a sort of reception or waiting room, and that it was empty. The door below it was also open, and with the idea that I would surely find someone there I walked on up the hall.

"I was in evening dress, and I felt I did not look like a burglar, so I had no great fear that, should I encounter one of the inmates of the house, he would shoot me on sight. The second door in the hall opened into a dining-room. This was also empty. One person had been dining at the table, but the cloth had not been cleared away and a flickering candle showed half-filled wine glasses and the ashes of cigarettes. The greater part of the room was in complete darkness.

"By this time I had grown conscious of the fact that I was wandering about in a strange house and that, apparently I was alone in it. The silence of the place began to try my nerves and in a sudden, unexplainable panic I started for the open street. But as I turned I saw a man sitting on a bench, which the curve of the balustrade had hidden from me. His eyes were shut and he was sleeping soundly.

"The moment before I had been bewildered because I could see no one, but at sight of this man I was much more bewildered.

"He was a very large man, a giant in height, with long yellow hair which hung below his shoulders. He was dressed in a red silk shirt that was belted at the waist and hung outside black velvet trou-

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sers which, in turn were stuffed into high black boots. I recognized the costume at once as that of a Russian servant, but what a Russian servant in his native livery could be doing in a private house in Knightsbridge was incomprehensible.

"I advanced and touched the man on the shoulder, and after an effort he awoke, and, on seeing me, sprang to his feet and began bowing rapidly and making deprecatory gestures. I had picked up enough Russian in Saint Petersburg to make out that the man was apologizing for having fallen asleep, and I also was able to explain to him that I desired to see his master.

"He nodded vigorously, and said, 'Will the Excellency come this way? The Princess is here.'

"I distinctly made out the word 'princess,' and I was a good deal embarrassed. I had thought it would be easy enough to explain my intrusion to a man, but how a woman would look at it was another matter, and as I followed him down the hall I was somewhat puzzled.

"As we advanced, he noticed that the front door was standing open, and with an exclamation of surprise hastened toward it and closed it. Then he rapped twice on the door of what was apparently the drawing-room. There was no reply to his knock, and he tapped again, and then timidly, and cringing subserviently opened the door and stepped inside. He withdrew himself at once and stared stupidly at me, shaking his head.

"'She is not there,' he said. He stood for a moment gazing blankly through the open door, and then hastened toward the dining-room. The solitary candle which still burned there seemed to assure him that the room also was empty. He came back and bowed me toward the drawing-room. 'She is above,' he said. 'I will inform the Princess of the Excellency's presence.'

"Before I could stop him he had turned and was running up the staircase, leaving me alone at the open door of the drawing-room. I decided that the adventure had gone quite far enough, and if I had been able to explain to the Russian that I had lost my way in the fog and only wanted to get back into the street again, I would have left the house on the instant.

"Of course, when I first rang the bell of the house I had no other expectation than that it would be answered by a parlormaid who would direct me on my way. I certainly could not then foresee that I would disturb a Russian princess in her boudoir, or that I might be thrown out by her athletic bodyguard.

"Still, I thought I ought not now to leave the house without making some apology and if the worst should come, I could show my card. They could hardly believe that a

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member of an Embassy had any designs upon the hat-rack.

"The room in which I stood was dimly lighted, but I could see that, like the hall, it was hung with heavy Persian rugs. The corners were filled with palms and there was the unmistakable odor in the air of Russian cigarettes and strange, dry scents that carried me back to the bazaars of Vladivostock. Near the front windows was a grand piano, and at the other end of the room a heavily carved screen of some black wood, picked out with ivory. The screen was overhung with a canopy of silken draperies and formed a sort of alcove.

"In front of the alcove was spread the white skin of a polar bear and set on that was one of those low Turkish coffee tables. It held a lighted spirit-lamp and two gold coffee cups. I had heard no movement from above stairs, and it must have been fully three minutes that I stood waiting, noting these details of the room and wondering at the delay and at the strange silence.

"And then, suddenly, as my eye grew more used to the half light, I saw, projecting from behind the screen as though it were stretched along the back of a divan, the hand of a man and the lower part of his arm. I was as startled as though I had come across a footprint on a deserted island. Evidently the man had been sitting there since I had come into the room, even since I had entered the house, and he had heard the servant knocking upon the door. Why he had not declared himself I could not understand, but I supposed that possibly he was a guest, with no reason to interest himself in the Princess's other visitors, or perhaps for some reason, he did not wish to be observed.

"I could see nothing of him except his hand, but I had an unpleasant feeling that he had been peering at me through the carving in the screen and that he still was doing so. I moved my feet noisily on the floor and said tentatively, 'I beg your pardon.'

"There was no reply, and the hand did not stir. Apparently the man was bent upon ignoring me, but as all I wished was to apologize for my intrusion and to leave the house, I walked up to the alcove and peered around it. Inside the screen was a divan piled with cushions and on the end of it nearer me the man was sitting.

"He was a young Englishman with light yellow hair and a deeply bronzed face. He was seated with his arms stretched out along the back of the divan and with his head resting against a cushion. His attitude was one of complete ease. But his mouth had fallen open and his eyes were set with an expression of utter horror.

"At the first glance I saw that he was quite dead.

(*continued next month*)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***Blunt's Brilliant Detectives***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Tommy and Tuppence
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	Not too long ago
COMMENTS:	*In which, with the aid of "special photographic apparatus," Tommy emulates the greatest of all scientific sleuths . . .*

"WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOing?" demanded Tuppence, as she entered the inner sanctum of the International Detective Agency (Slogan—Blunt's Brilliant Detectives) and discovered her lord and master prone on the floor in a sea of books.

Tommy struggled to his feet.

"I was trying to arrange these books on the top shelf of that cupboard," he complained. "And the damned chair gave way."

"What are they, anyway?" asked Tuppence, picking up a volume. "*The Hound of the Baskervilles.* I wouldn't mind reading that again some time."

"You see the idea?" said Tommy, dusting himself with care. "Half hours with the Great Masters—that sort of thing. You see, Tuppence, I can't help feeling that we are more or less amateurs at this business—of course amateurs in one sense we cannot help being, but it would do no harm to acquire the technique, so to speak. These books are detective stories by the leading masters of the art. I intend to try different styles, and compare results."

"H'm," said Tuppence. "I often wonder how those detectives would have got on in real life." She picked up another volume. "You'll find difficulty in being a Dr. Thorndyke. You've no medical

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experience, and less legal, and I never heard that science was your strong point."

"Perhaps not," said Tommy. "But at any rate I've bought a very good camera, and I shall photograph footprints and enlarge the negatives and all that sort of thing. Now, *mon ami,* use your little gray cells—what does this convey to you?"

He pointed to the bottom shelf of the cupboard. On it lay a somewhat futuristic dressing gown, a turkish slipper, and a violin.

"Obvious, my dear Watson," said Tuppence.

"Exactly," said Tommy. "The Sherlock Holmes touch."

He took up the violin and drew the bow idly across the strings, causing Tuppence to give a wail of agony.

At that moment the buzzer rang on the desk, a sign that a client had arrived in the outer office and was being held in parley by Albert, the office boy.

Tommy hastily replaced the violin in the cupboard and kicked the books behind the desk.

"Not that there's any great hurry," he remarked. "Albert will be handing them out the stuff about my being engaged with Scotland Yard on the phone. Get into your office and start typing, Tuppence. It makes the office sound busy and active. No, on second thought, you shall be taking notes in shorthand from my dictation. Let's have a look before we get Albert to send the victim in."

They approached the peephole which had been artistically contrived so as to command a view of the outer office.

The client was a girl of about Tuppence's age, tall and dark with a rather haggard face and scornful eyes.

"Clothes cheap and striking," remarked Tuppence. "Have her in, Tommy."

In another minute the girl was shaking hands with the celebrated Mr. Blunt, while Tuppence sat by with eyes demurely downcast, and pad and pencil in hand.

"My confidential secretary, Miss Robinson," said Mr. Blunt with a wave of the hand. "You may speak freely before her." Then he lay back for a minute, half closed his eyes, and remarked in a tired tone, "You must find traveling in a bus very crowded at this time of day."

"I came in a taxi," said the girl.

"Oh!" said Tommy aggrieved. His eyes rested reproachfully on a blue bus ticket protruding from her glove. The girl's eyes followed his glance. She smiled and drew it out.

"You mean this? I picked it up on the pavement. A little neighbor of ours collects them."

Tuppence coughed, and Tommy threw a baleful glare at her.

"We must get to business," he said briskly. "You are in need of our services, Miss—?"

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"Kingston Bruce is my name," said the girl. "We live at Wimbledon. Last night a lady who is staying with us lost a valuable pink pearl. Mr. St. Vincent was also dining with us, and during dinner he happened to mention your firm. My mother sent me off to you this morning to ask you if you would look into the matter for us."

The girl spoke sullenly, almost disagreeably. It was clear as daylight that she and her mother had not agreed over the matter. She was here under protest.

"I see," said Tommy, a little puzzled. "You have not called in the police?"

"No," said Miss Kingston Bruce, "we haven't. It would be idiotic to call in the police and then find that the silly thing had rolled under the fireplace, or something like that."

"Oh!" said Tommy. "Then the jewel may only be lost after all?"

Miss Kingston Bruce shrugged.

"People make such a fuss about things," she murmured.

Tommy cleared his throat.

"Of course," he said doubtfully. "I am extremely busy just now—"

"I quite understand," said the girl, rising to her feet. There was a quick gleam of satisfaction in her eyes which Tuppence, for one, did not miss.

"Nevertheless," continued Tommy, "I think I can manage to run down to Wimbledon. Will you give me the address, please?"

"The Laurels, Edgeworth Road."

"Make a note of it, please, Miss Robinson."

Miss Kingston Bruce hesitated, then said rather ungraciously, "We'll expect you then. Good morning."

"Funny girl," said Tommy. "I couldn't quite make her out."

"I wonder if she stole the thing herself," remarked Tuppence meditatively. "Come on, Tommy, let's put away these books and take the car and go down there. By the way, who are you going to be, Sherlock Holmes still?"

"I think I need more practice for that," said Tommy. "I came rather a cropper over that bus ticket, didn't I?"

"You did," said Tuppence. "If I were you I shouldn't try too much on that girl—she's as sharp as a needle. She's unhappy too, poor devil."

"I suppose you know all about her already," said Tommy with sarcasm, "simply from looking at the shape of her nose!"

"I'll tell you my idea of what we shall find at The Laurels," said Tuppence, quite unmoved. "A household of snobs, very keen to move in the best society; the father, if there is a father, is sure to have a military title. The girl falls in with their way of life and despises herself for doing so."

Tommy took a last look at the books now neatly ranged on a shelf.

"I think," he said thoughtfully,

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"that I shall be Dr. Thorndyke today."

"I shouldn't have thought there was anything medico-legal about this case," remarked Tuppence.

"Perhaps not," said Tommy. "But I'm simply dying to use that new camera of mine! It's supposed to have the most marvelous lens that ever was or ever could be."

"I know those kind of lenses," said Tuppence. "By the time you've adjusted the shutter and calculated the exposure, your brain gives out and you yearn for the simple Brownie."

"Only an unambitious soul is content with the simple Brownie."

"Well, I bet I shall get better results with it than you will."

Tommy ignored this challenge.

"I ought to have a 'Smoker's Companion'," he said regretfully. "I wonder where one buys them?"

"There's always the patent corkscrew Aunt Araminta gave you last Christmas," said Tuppence helpfully.

"That's true," said Tommy. "A curious looking engine of destruction I thought it at the time, and rather a humorous present to get from a strictly teetotal aunt."

"I," said Tuppence, "shall be Polton."

Tommy looked at her scornfully.

"Polton indeed. You couldn't begin to do one of the things that he does."

"Yes, I can," said Tuppence. "I can rub my hands together when I'm pleased. That's quite enough to get on with. I hope you're going to take plaster casts of footprints?"

Tommy was reduced to silence. Having collected the corkscrew they went round to the garage, got out the car, and started for Wimbledon.

The Laurels was a big house. It ran somewhat to gables and turrets, had an air of being very newly painted, and was surrounded with neat flower beds filled with scarlet geraniums.

A tall man with a close-cropped white mustache and an exaggeratedly martial bearing opened the door before Tommy had time to ring.

"I've been looking out for you," he explained fussily. "Mr. Blunt, is it not? I am Colonel Kingston Bruce. Will you come into my study?"

He led them into a small room at the back of the house.

"Young St. Vincent was telling me wonderful things about your firm. I've noticed your advertisements myself. This guaranteed twenty-four hours service of yours —a marvelous notion. That's exactly what I need."

Inwardly anathematizing Tuppence for her irresponsibility in inventing this brilliant detail, Tommy replied, "Just so, Colonel."

"The whole thing is most distressing, sir, most distressing."

"Perhaps you would kindly give me the facts," said Tommy, briskly.

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"Certainly I will—at once. We have at the present moment staying with us a very old and dear friend of ours, Lady Laura Barton. Daughter of the late Earl of Carrowway. The present Earl, her brother, made a striking speech in the House of Lords the other day. As I say, she is an old and dear friend of ours. Some American friends of mine who have just come over, the Hamilton Betts, were most anxious to meet her. 'Nothing easier,' I said. 'She is staying with me now. Come down for the week end.' You know how Americans are about titles, Mr. Blunt."

"And others besides Americans sometimes, Colonel Kingston Bruce."

"Alas, only too true, my dear sir. Nothing I hate more than a snob. Well, as I was saying, the Betts came down for the weekend. Last night—we were playing bridge at the time—the clasp of a pendant Mrs. Hamilton Bett was wearing broke, so she took it off and laid it down on a small table, meaning to take it upstairs with her when she went. This, however, she forgot to do. I must explain, Mr. Blunt, that the pendant consisted of two small diamond wings and a big pink pearl depending from them. The pendant was found this morning lying where Mrs. Bett had left it, but the pearl, a pearl of enormous value, had been wrenched off."

"Who found the pendant?"

"The parlormaid—Gladys Hill."

"Any reason to suspect her?"

"She has been with us some years, and we have always found her perfectly honest. But, of course, one never knows—"

"Exactly. Will you describe your staff, and also tell me who was present at dinner last night?"

"There is the cook—she has been with us only two months, but then she would have no occasion to go near the drawing-room—the same applies to the kitchen maid. Then there is the housemaid, Alice Cummings. She also has been with us for some years. And Lady Laura's maid, of course. She is French."

Colonel Kingston Bruce looked very impressive as he said this. Tommy, unaffected by the revelation of the maid's nationality, said, "Exactly. And the party at dinner?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Bett, ourselves—my wife and daughter—and Lady Laura. Young St. Vincent was dining with us, and Mr. Rennie looked in after dinner for a while."

"Who is Mr. Rennie?"

"A most pestilential fellow—an arrant socialist. Good-looking, of course, and with a certain specious power of argument. But a man, I don't mind telling you, whom I wouldn't trust a yard. A dangerous sort of fellow."

"In fact," said Tommy drily, "it is Mr. Rennie whom you suspect?"

"I do, Mr. Blunt. I'm sure, holding the views he does, that he can have no principles whatsoever.

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What could have been easier for him than to have quietly wrenched off the pearl at a moment when we were all absorbed in our game? There were several absorbing moments—a redoubled six no trump hand, I remember, and also a painful argument when my wife had the misfortune to revoke."

"Quite so," said Tommy. "I should just like to know one thing—what is Mrs. Bett's attitude in all this?"

"She wanted me to call in the police," said Colonel Kingston Bruce reluctantly. "That is, when we had searched everywhere in case the pearl had only dropped off."

"But you dissuaded her?"

"I was very averse to the idea of publicity and my wife and daughter backed me up. Then my wife remembered young St. Vincent speaking about your firm at dinner last night—and the twenty-four hours special service."

"Yes," said Tommy, with a heavy heart.

"You see, in any case no harm will be done. If we call in the police tomorrow, it can be supposed that we thought the jewel merely lost and were hunting for it. By the way, nobody has been allowed to leave the house this morning."

"Except your daughter, of course," said Tuppence, speaking for the first time.

"Except my daughter," agreed the Colonel. "She volunteered at once to go and put the case before you."

Tommy rose.

"We will do our best to give you satisfaction, Colonel," he said. "I should like to see the drawing-room, and the table on which the pendant was laid down. I should also like to ask Mrs. Bett a few questions. After that, I will interview the servants—or rather my assistant will do so."

He felt his nerve quailing before the terrors of questioning the servants.

Colonel Kingston Bruce threw open the door, and led them across the hall. As he did so, a remark came to them clearly through the open door of the room they were approaching, and the voice that uttered it was that of the girl who had come to see them that morning.

"You know perfectly well, mother," she was saying, "that she *did* bring home a teaspoon in her muff."

In another minute they were being introduced to Mrs. Kingston Bruce, a plaintive lady with a languid manner. Miss Kingston Bruce acknowledged their presence with a short inclination of the head. Her face was more sullen than ever.

Mrs. Kingston Bruce was voluble.

"—but I know who *I* think took it," she ended. "That dreadful socialist young man. He loves the Russians and hates the English—what else can you expect?"

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"He never touched it," said Miss Kingston Bruce fiercely. "I was watching him—all the time. I couldn't have failed to see if he had."

She looked at them defiantly with her chin up.

Tommy created a diversion by asking for an interview with Mrs. Bett. When Mrs. Kingston Bruce had departed accompanied by her husband and daughter to find Mrs. Bett, he whistled thoughtfully.

"I wonder," he said gently, "who it was who had a teaspoon in her muff?"

"Just what I was thinking," replied Tuppence.

Mrs. Bett, followed by her husband, burst into the room. She was a big woman, with a determined voice. Mr. Hamilton Bett looked dyspeptic and subdued.

"I understand, Mr. Blunt, that you are a private inquiry agent, and one who hustles things through at a great rate?"

"Hustle," said Tommy, "is my middle name, Mrs. Bett. Let me ask you a few questions."

Thereafter things proceeded rapidly. Tommy was shown the damaged pendant, the table on which it had lain, and Mr. Bett emerged from his taciturnity to mention the value, in dollars, of the stolen pearl.

And withal, Tommy felt an irritating certainty that he was not getting on.

"I think that will do," he said at length. "Miss Robinson, will you kindly fetch the special photographic apparatus from the hall?"

Miss Robinson complied.

"A little invention of my own," said Tommy. "In appearance, you see, it is just like an ordinary camera."

He had some slight satisfaction in seeing that the Betts were impressed.

He photographed the pendant, the table on which it had lain, and took several general views of the apartment. Then Miss Robinson was delegated to interview the servants, and in view of the eager expectancy on the faces of Colonel Kingston Bruce and Mrs. Bett, Tommy felt called upon to say a few authoritative words.

"The position amounts to this," he said. "Either the pearl is still in the house or it is not still in the house."

"Quite so," said the Colonel with more respect than was, perhaps, quite justified by the nature of the remark.

"If it is not in the house, it may be anywhere—but if it is in the house, it must necessarily be concealed somewhere—"

"And a search must be made," broke in Colonel Kingston Bruce. "Quite so. I give you *carte blanche*, Mr. Blunt. Search the house from attic to cellar."

"Oh, Charles," murmured Mrs. Kingston Bruce tearfully. "Do you think that is wise? The servants

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won't *like* it. I'm sure they'll leave."

"We will search their quarters last," said Tommy soothingly. "The thief is sure to have hidden the gem in the most unlikely place."

"I seem to have read something of the kind," agreed the Colonel.

"Quite so," said Tommy. "You probably remember the case of Rex *v.* Bailey which created a precedent."

"Oh—er—yes," said the Colonel looking puzzled.

"Now, the most unlikely place is in Mrs. Bett's room," continued Tommy.

"My, wouldn't that be too cute?" said Mrs. Bett admiringly.

Without more ado, she took him up to her room where Tommy once more made use of the special photographic apparatus.

Presently Tuppence joined him there.

"You have no objection, I hope, Mrs. Bett, to my assistant's looking through your wardrobe?"

"Why, not at all. Do you need me here any longer?"

Tommy assured her that there was no need to detain her, and Mrs. Bett departed.

"We might as well go on bluffing it out," said Tommy. "But personally I don't believe we've a dog's chance of finding the thing. Curse you and your twenty-four hours stunt, Tuppence."

"Listen," said Tuppence. "The servants are all right, I'm sure, but I managed to get something out of the French maid. It seems that when Lady Laura was staying here a year ago, she went out to tea with some friends of the Kingston Bruces', and when she got home a teaspoon fell out of her muff. Everyone thought it must have fallen in by accident. But, talking about similar robberies, I got hold of a lot more. Lady Laura is always staying with people. She hasn't got a bean, I gather, and she's out for comfortable quarters with people to whom a title still means something. It may be a coincidence or it may be something more, but five distinct thefts have taken place while she has been staying in various houses, sometimes trivial things, sometimes valuable jewels."

"Whew!" said Tommy. "Where's the old bird's room, do you know?"

"Just across the passage."

"Then I rather think we'll just slip across and investigate."

The room opposite stood with its door ajar. It was a spacious apartment, with white enameled fitments and rose-pink curtains. An inner door led to a bathroom. At the door of this appeared a slim dark girl, very neatly dressed.

Tuppence checked the exclamation of astonishment on the girl's lips.

"This is Elise, Mr. Blunt," she said primly. "Lady Laura's maid."

Tommy stepped across the threshold of the bathroom and approved its sumptuous, up-to-date fittings. He set to work to dispel

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the wide stare of suspicion on the French girl's face.

"You are busy with your duties, eh, Mademoiselle Elise?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I clean Milady's bath."

"Well, perhaps you'll help me with some photography instead. I have a special kind of camera here, and I am photographing the interiors of all the rooms in this house."

He was interrupted by the communicating door to the bedroom banging suddenly behind him. Elise jumped at the sound.

"What did that?"

"It must have been the wind," said Tuppence.

"We will come into the other room," said Tommy.

Elise went to open the door for them, but the doorknob rattled aimlessly.

"What's the matter?" said Tommy sharply.

"Ah, Monsieur, but somebody must have locked it on the other side." She caught up a towel and tried again. But this time the door handle turned easily enough, and the door swung open.

"*Voila ce qui est curieux.* It must have stuck," said Elise.

There was no one in the bedroom.

Tommy fetched his apparatus. Tuppence and Elise worked under his orders. But again and again his glance went back to the communicating door.

"I wonder," he said between his teeth, "why that door stuck?"

He examined it minutely, shutting and opening it. It fitted perfectly.

"One picture more," he said with a sigh. "Will you loop back that rose curtain, Mademoiselle Elise? Thank you. Just hold it so."

The familiar click occurred. He handed a glass slide to Elise to hold, relinquished the tripod to Tuppence, and carefully readjusted and closed the camera.

He made some easy excuse to get rid of Elise, and as soon as she was out of the room he caught hold of Tuppence and spoke rapidly.

"Look here, I've got an idea. Can you hang on here? Search all the rooms—that will take some time. Try and get an interview with the old bird—Lady Laura—but don't alarm her. Tell her you suspect the parlormaid. But whatever you do, don't let her leave the house. I'm going off in the car. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"All right," said Tuppence. "But don't be too cocksure. You've forgotten one thing."

"What's that?"

"The girl. There's something funny about that girl. Listen, I've found out the time she started from the house this morning. It took her two hours to get to our office. That's nonsense. Where did she go before she came to us?"

"There's something in that," admitted her husband. "Well, follow

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up any old clue you like, but don't let Lady Laura leave the house. What's that?"

His quick ear had caught a faint rustle outside on the landing. He strode across to the door, but there was no one to be seen.

"Well, so long," he said. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Tuppence watched him drive off in the car with a faint misgiving. Tommy was very sure—she herself was not so sure. There were one or two things she did not quite understand.

She was still standing by the window, watching the road, when she saw a man leave the shelter of a gateway opposite, cross the road, and ring the bell.

In a flash Tuppence was out of the room and down the stairs. Gladys Hill, the parlormaid, was emerging from the back part of the house, but Tuppence motioned her back authoritatively. Then she went to the front door and opened it.

A lanky young man with ill-fitting clothes and eager dark eyes was standing on the step.

He hesitated a moment, then said, "Is Miss Kingston Bruce in?"

"Will you come inside?" said Tuppence.

She stood aside to let him enter, closing the door.

"Mr. Rennie, I think?" she said sweetly.

He shot a quick glance at her. "Er—yes."

"Will you come in here, please?"

She opened the study door. The room was empty, and Tuppence entered it after him, closing the door behind her. He turned on her with a frown.

"I want to see Miss Kingston Bruce."

"I am not quite sure that you can," said Tuppence composedly.

"Look here, who the devil are you?" said Mr. Rennie rudely.

"International Detective Agency," said Tuppence succinctly—and noticed Mr. Rennie's uncontrollable start.

"Please sit down, Mr. Rennie," she went on. "To begin with, we know all about Miss Kingston Bruce's visit to you this morning."

It was a bold guess, but it succeeded. Perceiving his consternation, Tuppence went on quickly.

"The recovery of the pearl is the great thing, Mr. Rennie. No one in this house is anxious for—publicity. Can't we come to some arrangement?"

The young man looked at her keenly.

"I wonder how much you know," he said thoughtfully. "Let me think for a moment."

He buried his head in his hands, then asked a most unexpected question.

"I say, is it really true that young St. Vincent is engaged to be married?"

"Quite true," said Tuppence. "I know the girl."

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Mr. Rennie suddenly became confidential.

"It's been hell," he confided. "They've been asking him here morning, noon, and night—chucking Miss Bruce at his head. All because he'll come into a title some day. If I had my way—"

"Don't let's talk politics," said Tuppence hastily. "Do you mind telling me, Mr. Rennie, why you think Miss Kingston Bruce took the pearl?"

"I—I don't."

"You do," said Tuppence calmly. "You wait to see the detective, as you think, drive off and the coast clear, then you come and ask for her. It's obvious. If you'd taken the pearl yourself, you wouldn't be half so upset."

"Her manner was so odd," said the young man. "She came this morning and told me about the robbery, explaining that she was on her way to a firm of private detectives. She seemed anxious to say something, yet not able to get it out."

"Well," said Tuppence. "All I want is the pearl. You'd better go and talk to her."

But at that moment Colonel Kingston Bruce opened the door.

"Lunch is ready, Miss Robinson. You will lunch with us—"

Then he stopped and glared at the guest.

"Clearly," said Mr. Rennie, "you don't want to ask me to lunch. All right, I'll go."

"Come back later," whispered Tuppence, as he passed her.

Tuppence followed Colonel Kingston Bruce, still growling into his mustache about the impudence of some people, into a massive dining-room where the family was already assembled. Only one person present was unknown to Tuppence.

"This, Lady Laura, is Miss Robinson who is kindly assisting us."

Lady Laura bent her head, then proceeded to stare at Tuppence through her pince nez. She was a tall thin woman, with a sad smile, a gentle voice, and very hard shrewd eyes. Tuppence returned her stare, and Lady Laura's eyes dropped.

After lunch Lady Laura entered into conversation with an air of gentle curiosity. How was the inquiry proceeding? Tuppence laid suitable stress on the suspicion attaching to the parlormaid, but her mind was not really on Lady Laura. Lady Laura might conceal teaspoons and other articles in her clothing, but Tuppence felt fairly sure that she had not taken the pink pearl.

Presently Tuppence proceeded with her search of the house. Time was going on. There was no sign of Tommy, and what mattered far more to Tuppence, there was no sign of Mr. Rennie. Suddenly Tuppence came out of a bedroom and collided with Miss Bruce who was going downstairs. She was fully dressed for the street.

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"I'm afraid," said Tuppence, "that you mustn't go out just now."

The other girl looked at her haughtily.

"Whether I go out or not is no business of yours," she said coldly.

"It is my business whether I communicate with the police or not, though," said Tuppence.

The girl turned ashy pale.

"You mustn't—you mustn't—I won't go out—but don't do that." She clung to Tuppence beseechingly.

"My dear Miss Kingston Bruce," said Tuppence smiling. "The case has been perfectly clear to me from the start—"

But she was interrupted. In the stress of her encounter with the girl Tuppence had not heard the front-door bell. Now, to her astonishment, Tommy came bounding up the stairs, and in the hall below she caught sight of a big burly man in the act of removing a bowler hat.

"Detective Inspector Marriot of Scotland Yard," he said with a grin.

With a cry, Miss Kingston Bruce tore herself from Tuppence's grasp and dashed down the stairs, just as the front door was opened once more to admit Mr. Rennie.

"Now you *have* torn it," said Tuppence bitterly.

"Eh?" said Tommy, hurrying into Lady Laura's room. He passed on into the bathroom and brought out a large cake of soap. The Inspector was just mounting the stairs.

"She went quietly," he announced. "She's an old hand, and knows when the game is up. What about the pearl?"

"I rather fancy," said Tommy, handing him the soap, "that you'll find it in here."

The Inspector's eyes lit up appreciatively.

"An old trick, and a good one. Cut a cake of soap in half, scoop out a place for the jewel, clap it together again, and smooth the joint over with hot water. A very smart piece of work on your part, sir."

Tommy accepted the compliment gracefully. He and Tuppence descended the stairs. Colonel Kingston Bruce rushed at him and shook him warmly by the hand.

"My dear sir, I can't thank you enough. Lady Laura wants to thank you also—"

"I am glad we have given you satisfaction," said Tommy. "But I'm afraid I can't stop. I have a most urgent appointment. Member of the Cabinet."

He hurried out to the car and jumped in. Tuppence jumped in beside him.

"But Tommy," she cried. "Haven't they arrested Lady Laura, after all?"

"Oh," said Tommy, "didn't I tell you? They've not arrested Lady Laura. They've arrested Elise."

"You see," he went on, as Tuppence sat dumfounded, "I've often

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tried to open a door with soap on my hands myself. It can't be done—your hands slip. So I wondered what Elise could have been doing with the soap to get her hands as slippery as all that. She caught up a towel, you remember, so there were no traces of soap on the handle afterwards. But it occurred to me that if you were a professional thief, it wouldn't be a bad plan to be maid to a lady suspected of kleptomania who stayed about a good deal in different houses. So I managed to get a photo of her as well as of the room, induced her to handle a glass slide, and toddled off to dear old Scotland Yard. Lightning development of negative, successful identification of fingerprints—and photo. Elise was a long lost friend. Useful place, Scotland Yard."

"And to think," said Tuppence, finding her voice, "that those two young idiots were only suspecting each other the way they do in books. But why didn't you tell me what you were up to when you went off?"

"In the first place, I suspected that Elise was listening on the landing, and in the second place—"

He paused.

"Yes?"

"My learned friend forgets," said Tommy. "Dr. Thorndyke never tells until the last moment."

"Q"

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The few wholly reliable anthologists (with the happy exception of Queen) produce collections all too infrequently. Lee Wright's WICKED WOMEN (Pocket Books, 25¢)—her first in almost 18 years—contains 12 stories of the varied deadliness of the female (4 from EQMM and one by EQ), ranging in quality from high to highest. Some may be already on your shelves; but the standard of writing and plotting makes this a must.

★★★★ **STRIKE FOR A KINGDOM, *by Mena Gallie*** (Harper, $3.50)

Murder of oppressive mine manager in Wales during strike in 1926 furnishes material for an infectiously warm, humorous, vital picture of place and people—a delightful and refreshing book.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Herewith the third tale in our renewed and rehabilitated Department of "First Stories" . . . How long is it since you've read a ghost story? Too long probably—ghost stories are a wonderful change of pace in the broad field of mystery, and here is a most ingenious one, complete with murder, withal charming and brightly allusive.

The author is a Californian, in her late thirties, and married to a geological engineer; at the time this story was written, they were living in Livorno (Leghorn), Italy. Even though "A Visit from Brother Thomas" is her first fiction sale, Mrs. Roy has had a prolific writing background: she was first published at the tender age of six—"The Astonished Elephant," on the Children's Page of "The Denver Post"; she began writing again in her early twenties—a full-length book (unpublished), scientific articles for her husband, publicity in Alaska, radio scripts and musicals with parody lyrics for various Army bases, Women's Club skits, verse—Cardinal Spellman and Monsignor Finnegan collect her religious verses—and now, with all our good wishes, in the pages of EQMM . . .

A VISIT FROM BROTHER THOMAS

by JUNE McMAHAN ROY

THE LIVES OF GREAT MEN ALL REmind us that the man nobody knows is the man nobody wants to know. It is only after the public is reasonably well informed about a man that it will buy his "Life." For instance, the career of that extraordinary scientist, Dr. Brian Blossom Bell, became absorbingly interesting only after rockets and Dr. Bell—shot with supersonic speed into the daily headlines from their relative obscurity in scientific journals.

But B.R.—Before Rockets—the market for a "Life of Dr. Bell" would have been limited to a handful of fellow-scientists, to his elder sister, the captivating Miss Betsy, and to his lifelong friend, the suave and genial Dr. Mayhew. Mrs. Bell, whose beauty was as brilliant as her mind was not, might have taken her sapphire eyes from the field of fashion long enough to skim the bits concerning her courtship and marriage with the eccentric rocket authority. But then, with a delicate yawn for duty done, she would have resumed her contented appraisal of the latest Paris fashions.

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After Rockets, of course, when every literate person in the world was familiar with the name of Dr. Bell, every literate person in the world was a potential buyer of the "Life of Dr. Bell."

I got the assignment on the strength of an extended profile in a sophisticated magazine and a not unsuccessful career in the field of biography. I spent less time than I care to admit in gathering information from Dr. Bell and his intimates and then left New York with my wife, my typewriter, and my notes.

We chose Italy mainly because my wife is an artist and I had promised her an opportunity for a leisurely study of the galleries in Florence, but also because we knew not a soul in that whole lovely country. For I would rather talk than write; and with no friends available and conversations with the villagers limited to my seven words of Italian, I worked while my wife spent blissful hours in the Uffizi and the Palazzo Pitti.

It would have been more convenient for her if we had settled in Florence, but I would have been tempted beyond my strength by the sidewalk cafés and the teeming, English-speaking tourists. So we rented a villa by the sea and my wife commuted to Florence by train. This arrangement gave her an opportunity to perfect her Italian during the hour-long train ride and gave me long and incredibly undistracted days at the typewriter.

At last, however, the end of my bondage was in sight—if one had remarkably keen eyes. I have always groaned the loudest over the closing pages, especially if the subject is still living, when the agony of tidying things up in the last chapter becomes almost insupportable. True, I groan even when the subject is dead. But death *does* make a neater, more satisfying finish. The final period is final indeed.

On the night in question I was moaning rather more than I usually do because it was nearly midnight, because I was both sleepy and at a loss, and because our best friends, the Sullivans, were arriving for a visit. Mike Sullivan was the most entertaining conversationalist I knew and I had to finish the book before he came and wooed me from my task.

I finished my beer and was rereading the last few pages I had written, looking for a bridge to the final chapter, when a movement near the armchair in the corner of the room attracted my attention. I looked up, expecting to see my wife, although she had told me that she would probably stay in Florence overnight and bring the Sullivans back to the villa in the morning.

However, it was not my small, sleek wife in the armchair, but an immense, untidy Franciscan monk, the folds of his brown habit bunched awkwardly over his knees.

I may doze over a book now and then, but never over my own exas-

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perating prose, which tends to keep me awake when I would rather be in bed. So I was certain that I was not dreaming. Strangely, although I felt neither fear nor amazement, nor any other of the emotions traditionally associated with supernatural experiences, I knew at once that the monk was a ghost.

He had a gentle smile and a friendly expression, and when he caught my eye he inclined his head affably and said, "Buona sera, Signore."

Smiling in response I said, "Buona sera . . ."

"Brother Thomas," he supplied in English on hearing my accent. Then, nodding toward the typewriter, he added, "It is hard, is it not, to leave a work unfinished?"

"I suppose it must be," I said after a moment's thought. "Although I have always been lucky enough to finish anything I have seriously undertaken. Not that they aren't incomplete sketches, fragments, ideas," I went on, for it seemed quite natural to fall into a discussion with this sympathetic ghost. "Every writer has his head and notebooks full of those. But the real bread-and-butter stuff has always, somehow, gone through to the very end."

He gave me a sweet smile and folded his hands comfortably over his enormous paunch. "There is that, however," he said, glancing again at the typewriter.

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled. I might be momentarily at a loss, but I was confident that I could find the suitable final flourish to the book.

He smiled more broadly and wagged his fine head. "Dickens and Sterne were the same," he told me. "I had to *come*"—and he gave the word an intonation that made me suddenly more attentive—"to accompany them, too. . . . As a writer, myself, Signore, I understand your reluctance to leave your unfinished manuscript. But you really must, my dear fellow."

"I don't think I understand you," I said untruthfully, for I had grasped his meaning perfectly. "Unless I am . . ."

I let the sentence trail off questioningly as he raised his bushy eyebrows gravely and finished it for me.

"Dead."

There was a little silence, quite companionable, and then I said foolishly, "My death comes as a great shock to me. In fact, I have been feeling unusually well recently."

Brother Thomas said nothing, but continued to sit quietly, radiating sympathy while I absorbed his astounding news.

I looked at the typewriter with the unfinished page in the roller, at the empty beer bottle beside it, and then out the window where the umbrella pines were silvered by the moonlight. Beyond them the Tyrrhenian Sea was also rippled silver,

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and I could smell the kelp and hear the surf pounding on the rocky beach below the villa.

With all my senses in operation I found it almost impossible to believe that I was dead.

"Heart, I suppose," I said at last, for one read frequently enough of men in apparently good health who died unexpectedly of heart attacks.

Brother Thomas looked at me sadly. "I fear not."

"You *fear* not?"

"You were poisoned, Signore . . . *murdered!*"

For a long moment I sat dumbly trying to take this in and make some sense of it. I was mature enough to realize that I was not universally beloved, but I honestly could not think of anyone who might hate me enough to undertake my murder. And even those who disliked me were all on the other side of the Atlantic.

"You must be mistaken," I told Brother Thomas. "I should certainly have noticed being murdered."

"A quick-acting poison in your nightly libation would, I think, pass almost unnoticed," he said. Then he frowned a little. "Almost. You should certainly have been aware of the transition from one State to another."

"No," I said, staring at the lethal beer bottle, "I didn't notice a thing. How long has it been?"

Brother Thomas seemed distressed by the question and began nervously to pleat his brown habit as he looked at the clock on the shelf over my desk.

"This is very disutrbing," he said worriedly. "It has been a little over six hours—and yet I was just notified."

"Six hours!" I exclaimed, getting up and pacing around the room. "You mean that I've been dead for six hours and didn't even realize it?"

"It seems so," he said apologetically. "Believe me, caro Signore, this is highly unusual. I shall have to investigate when we Return."

"Speaking of investigations," I said, standing before him, "I trust that there will be an investigation into my death. I don't know how the Italian system of . . ."

He shook his head reproachfully. "Vengeance is not yours, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of revenge," I said inaccurately. "But when a seemingly healthy man dies suddenly, there is always a police inquiry. Even here in Italy, where they like to postpone things, there is bound to be. . . . And then there's the poisoner. Who was it?"

My heart turned over as I looked at the monk in supplication.

"I'm truly sorry, Signore," he said, leaning forward and placing his hand on my arm. "It was your wife."

I sat down dazedly, unable to believe it. And yet, who else could it have been? We knew hardly anyone in the village except Annamaria,

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who came in twice a week to tidy up, and Mario, who hacked about inefficiently in the yard on Fridays.

My wife, too, was the only one who knew my habit of drinking a beer before going to bed. Easy to drop something in it before she went to Florence—I wondered what it was and where she had got it. I had simply taken the first bottle in the refrigerator. Had the cap been loose? I couldn't remember.

"But what motive could she have?" I demanded, bewildered. After twenty years of love and devoted companionship it seemed incredible that she should suddenly have decided to kill me. "Why did she do it?"

Carefully the monk tied another knot in the already knotted white cord about his waist, then he sighed and spread his hands helplessly. "She has been in love with your friend and doctor for a very long . . ."

"Dr. Sullivan?" I exclaimed. "Why, he and his sister are in Italy now. In fact, my wife went to Florence to meet them this morning and is bringing them here tomorrow." I looked at the clock. "Today."

"Exactly. Your own medical man will be on hand to certify your death from natural causes."

"But he can't do that!" I said, my mind spinning. "Mike Sullivan is not only my doctor, he's my best friend. He wouldn't play around with my wife! Besides, he gave me a complete physical less than a year ago," I told Brother Thomas triumphantly, "and he said then that I was so healthy it was disgusting to a doctor who had to make a living!"

"So he told you."

"Do you mean that there *was* something wrong, that he *concealed* it from me?"

"No," said the monk. "But he and your wife already envisioned this occurrence, so he entered a notation on your medical record that you were suffering from a serious heart ailment."

"That's unethical!"

The monk looked as if he were trying not to laugh at me. "So is murder, Signore. But if the question ever arose, they were prepared with a year-old entry, verified by his office nurse, that you had a heart condition that might be fatal at any time. He also supplied the poison, which had the virtue, from their standpoint, of simulating a heart attack."

Stunned even more by the revelation of Mike's and my wife's duplicity than I had been at the news of my own death, I could only shake my head in mute dsibelief until Brother Thomas stood up and adjusted the white cord about his immense waist.

"And now, caro Signore," he told me gently, "we really must be going."

I, too, stood, and then turned toward the typewriter with some ab-

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surd notion of leaving a note for the police. But of course Mike and my wife would destroy it.

Misunderstanding my hesitation, the monk shook his heavy head regretfully. "No, you cannot finish that now. I'm truly sorry. But there has already been, for reasons I do not understand, a six-hour delay and you have certain formalities to undergo. Also," he glanced at the clock and began to move toward the door, "I have my own work to do."

"What is your work?" I asked absently, frowning unhappily at the pages of manuscript on the desk.

Pleased by my interest, Brother Thomas paused and said, "I sustain a tradition at the Abbey on the hill between here and Florence. Every morning between the hours of two and three, the incumbent monks hear the scratching of a pen on parchment in the Abbot's old office in the north tower. Tradition says it is the Abbot," he chuckled, "but bless his soul, he was never a writer. A very sound administrator and a saintly man withal, but as his clerk, I did all the writing. So you see, I am able to go on with my work and yet keep up the tradition. A very congenial occupation."

He smiled, delighted with his recollections. Then he sobered and said, "But come, Dr. Bell. We must leave."

Stupefied with amazement, I stared at him. And then I whirled, flipped out the top page of the manuscript on the desk, and held it out to Brother Thomas with shaking hands.

"As I told you in the beginning," he said patiently, brushing aside the paper, "I know how you feel about leaving an incomplete work. I have, in fact, been working recently on a manuscript I left unfinished nearly six hundred years ago. But . . ."

He stopped then to peer at the title page, which I was holding insistently before him, and then looked at me with the greatest bafflement.

The working title read: *The Autobiography of Brian Blossom Bell.*

"But if it is the story of your life," he said, bringing his bushy brows together in a frown of reproof, "it is up-to-date, surely. Someone else can . . ."

"*My* name," I said quietly but distinctly, "is Francis Xavier O'Neill."

He looked at me blankly and I went on, "I am a biographer by profession, Brother Thomas, but I have recently been working on Dr. Bell's *auto*biography. I think that the source of all this confusion lies in this,"—I tapped the manuscript—"my first venture into *ghost-writ*ing."

The poor monk sat down heavily and tied another knot in the white cord. "But that is impossible!"

"We may assume, I take it, that Dr. Bell is the one who is dead?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "Decidedly!"

"It's easily explained, then," I

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said, moving about the room, wonderfully alive and acute and giddy with relief and love for my wife and devotion to Mike and all the jumble of things and people I had been about to surrender forever.

"You were puzzled by the six-hour delay, but as you arrived at the villa at midnight and there is a six-hour time differential between Italy and Dr. Bell's home in New York, he must have died at six o'clock last evening. If you had gone there instead of coming here, you would have been in at the death, so to speak. . . . You erred in your choice of ghosts."

Brother Thomas absorbed this information rapidly, then stood up, his brown habit swirling about his ankles as he prepared to depart.

"I shall see you later, caro Signore," he said. "At least," he added with a twinkle in his eye, "I most sincerely hope so."

And with a sweet smile and a gesture of benediction he disappeared.

As soon as the village began its leisurely day I telephoned Miss Betsy Bell and told her to insist on an autopsy on her brother, the result of which led to the sensational trial and conviction of Mrs. Bell and Dr. Mayhew.

The Autobiography of Brian Blossom Bell is enjoying equally sensational sales, largely owing, I like to think, to the *Epilogue,* by Francis X. O'Neill.

I have never written a more satisfactory final chapter—thanks to the error of Brother Thomas.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Stanley & Livingstone, Detectives***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: In darkest Africa

TIME: 1871-72

COMMENTS: *When this story opens, Stanley has already given his famous greeting: "Doctor Livingstone, I presume?" Now the two explorers are about to return to civilization when a new danger—the greatest of them all—threatens.*

RISING EARLY ON THAT FATEFUL day of our departure from Ujiji on December 27, 1871, I went out and sat upon the verandah of Livingstone's thatched house and watched the dawn appear along the edge of the mountain plateau.

I could hear my people stirring all about the village, the clatter of earthenware and the excited chaffering, which told me my Zanzibar freemen and porters were eager to make the start upon the return trip to their coastal homeland, six months march away.

Livingstone's huge black servant Chuma appeared then like a shadow at my elbow and told me his master wished to see me, and I followed him inside.

A glance at Livingstone, lying upon his pallet, reassured me. I had feared a recurrence of his malaria, which would have made him unfit for our imminent journey; but his fine-boned features, though emaciated, had a healthier color than they had had for some time past.

And then Livingstone surprised me.

"You must go on without me," he said with a feeble wave of the hand. "I am ill, but now that you have brought me quinine I will be all right."

I was certain he was feigning illness, but surely not malingering. It was not in his nature to do so.

"But you can't stay here in Ujiji," I said carefully. "Contact with the coast is cut off by the hostile and ambitious chief, Mirambo. We've

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got to get you as far as Unyanyembe, as we agreed. There you will have medical attention and can rest, and I can send you back supplies and means for raising another expedition to explore the Lualaba River. Is that not what you want most of all?"

The doctor closed his eyes at my words and I could see that he mastered his eagerness with great difficulty.

When he did not reply, I said, "May I suggest, Doctor Livingstone, that for reasons that are unquestionably worthy and unselfish you are deliberately maneuvering to be left behind? But you cannot stave me off that easily. We shall *carry* you to Unyanyembe, if need be."

"No, no, it is not fair!" the old man cried, sitting up on his pallet with abundant vitality. "In spite of my objections, Mr. Stanley, you have made me your responsibility. Six weeks ago you found me here at Ujiji and believed you had discovered me for your newspaper. But that was not quite true. I was not lost! I was making no attempt to return to civilization. But you *did* bring me new hope and promises of help in my ventures. And for that I am deeply grateful. Therefore, I will not let you, out of a misplaced sense of responsibility, take on misfortune that is intended to be visited upon me alone. I will not jeopardize the success of your return march to Zanzibar!"

"But how could you?" I asked, startled.

"If I accompany you to Unyanyembe, you will doubtless consider that I am in your charge."

"Certainly all my readers will consider you so."

"And if something should happen to me en route, they might hold you responsible."

"No doubt of it."

"And what then, Mr. Stanley, *if I were murdered?*"

I gasped at the doctor. Could this be the strong, quiet, tenacious explorer and humanitarian whom I so admired, speaking like Henry Irving in one of his plays? Before I had time to reply, the doctor lifted his red flannel blouse at the waist and revealed a fresh, jagged scratch which ran at least eight inches between breast-bone and hip.

"I received that wound late last night," he said calmly. "Chuma heard somebody tiptoe across the veranda and followed him in here. I turned over just in time or I would have been dead before the start of the journey."

"Who was it?"

"I do not know. He got away from Chuma in the dark."

"But certainly Chuma would know if he were a white man or a native?"

"The man was naked and oiled. That's why Chuma lost hold of him."

"Then he was probably black."

"Not necessarily. A white man

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could oil himself for the purpose of quick escape."

I thought a moment. "But you've done nothing but good out here, Doctor. Most of the natives love you. Who could possibly want to injure you?"

"Most of the natives do not love me, Mr. Stanley. Some of them ridicule me and others hate my influence among them. On the other hand, there are the Portuguese slave traders. One of them, Senhor Goiaz—who will travel with your party today—just last week threatened to cut my throat for removing a tree fork which galled the neck of one of his slaves."

"I will speak at once to Goiaz," I said, starting for the door.

"Wait!" Livingstone cried. "I do not accuse him. Perhaps Senhor Goiaz is merely—voluble. You asked who could possibly wish to injure me and I have tried to think. There is also Abed bin Suliman, the Arab official who is a fanatical Mohammedan and looks at me with murderous eyes because I advocate the spread of Christian missions in German East Africa. Abed will also travel with your party. So you see why it is better for you that I stay in Ujiji."

"Doctor Livingstone!" I cried. "I cannot in conscience leave you here, cut off from the civilized world! They would never forgive me! I must take you back with me."

The doctor frowned and for a moment I thought he was going to resist. Then he shrugged his rounded shoulders, smiled, and said, "I suppose if I tried to hold out, you'd wrap my ruckle of bones in a hammock and take me along anyway. Very well. But I thought it only fair to warn you . . ."

We left Ujiji before the sun rose, a compact caravan consisting of five whites, twenty armed freemen of Zanzibar (I had lost eleven on my trek east); one hundred porters, and fifteen pack animals.

Besides Livingstone and me, the whites consisted of the Portuguese slave trader, Goiaz, and a German ivory merchant, Weyerhauser, both of whom had been stranded in Ujiji when an Arab caravan from the north, with which they had been travelling, straggled broken and famine-struck into the village several days after my arrival there. The fifth member, Abed bin Suliman, was a resident of Ujiji who told me he wished to travel to the coast on political business which concerned his uncle, the Arab governor of Ujiji.

The governor himself was on hand to wave us goodbye through the gates of the village and the whole population did likewise by leaping up and down amid the orchestral accompaniment of drums and horns, crying, "Yambo! Yambo!"

After hours of struggling through the cane-brakes of the valley we mounted to a wooded height, and

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at ten o'clock I halted the caravan for our final glimpse of the village of Ujiji, looking tiny and insignificant upon the vast shoreline of Lake Tanganyika.

Now I had my hands full keeping eyes upon Goiaz and Abed bin Suliman, as well as watching the trail and porters. Whether Livingstone thought my concern for his welfare was needful or not, I felt the weight of it very keenly. How could I tell Mr. James Gordon Bennett of the "New York Herald" that I had *found* Livingstone if, directly afterwards, I lost him again!

On the fifth day, as we turned south to avoid cutting through land dominated by Mirambo, the Portuguese slave trader Goiaz came striding up to the head of the line and fell into step by my side. He was a small, lithe fellow of about forty, with a swarthy, oily skin and drooping black moustache from under which he now flashed a dazzling and ingratiating smile.

"Senhor Stanley," he said politely, "a word I beg to have with you."

"Yes?"

"Senhor Livingstone speaks of exploring the Lualaba; he believes it to be the source of the Nile River. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"And if he should prove it, would not big English ships come up the river and soldiers, too, and disarm the slave traders—wipe them out? That is what the doctor says would happen."

"Possibly," I said. "I should certainly approve of it!"

"Thank you, senhor, thank you," Goiaz said, bowing with a false show of humility and retiring to his place in the line. I doubted at once whether I should have spoken so frankly, but then we came to the Malagarazi River and in the exertion of crossing that swiftly flowing stream I forgot the incident.

The next day as we entered the red-earthed Kawendi country, I fell ill again with malaria, my temperature rose to 105, and I had to take a heavy dosage of quinine which made me half mad and distressingly weak. Livingstone, on the other hand, strode briskly along beneath an umbrella held over him by Chuma to protect him from the sun, and I thought it might be I who ended up carried in a hammock!

In the evening, after a repast upon zebra meat of which we had secured a quantity upon the plain that afternoon, I went to the black cook Ulimengo and sharply scolded him for not cleaning his coffee pots, and said that I tasted the verdigris in every article of food.

"Do you mean to poison us?" I demanded, showing him the kettles and the pots and the loathsome green upon the rims.

Ulimengo turned to me with an astoundingly insolent expression.

"You think you any better than the 'big master?' Hah? What is good for *him* is good enough for you, the *little master!*"

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I clouted him at once, not only for his insolent question, but because I recognized a disposition to fight. Later I realized that also I resented the fact that after the greater part of a year in my company Ulimengo should have, in six short weeks, given his allegiance to Livingstone!

Ulimengo took hold of me with his big black hands, and I shook off his grasp, seeking some handy instrument; but at this point Livingstone came out of his tent.

"Poli-poli-hapo!" (Gently there!) he cried. "What is the matter, Mr. Stanley?"

Almost breathless between passion and quinine I spluttered out my explanations. Then lifting his right hand he said, "I will settle this."

And as he spoke to Ulimengo, scolding him mildly as a father might an erring six-year-old, I realized the tremendous power the doctor had for spreading the Christian ethic by example alone. Such influence among openly receptive minds might totter dynasties!

"I am a Mgeni (guest), Ulimengo," Livingstone said, "and have nothing to do with this caravan. Everything in camp is my friend's. The food I eat, the clothes on my back, the shirt I wear—all are his. All the bales and beads are his. What you put in that belly of yours comes from him, not from me. He pays your wages. He came only to help me as you would help your brother or your father. I am only the 'big master' because I am older; but when we march, or stop, it must be as *he* likes, not me. What have I told you about Jesus, Ulimengo, who urges you to love thy brother? And we must obey God rather than men. Besides, don't you see that Mr. Stanley is very ill, you rascal? Now go and ask his pardon. Go on!"

With evident contrition Ulimengo took a step forward, but we were suddenly interrupted by a wild cry from beyond the fire, and looking up I saw approach a small, white-bearded old man clad in a white tunic and burnoose. It was the Arab official, Abed bin Suliman, his wizened face contorted with rage and his eyes blazing.

"Be not thou a skulking dog of a Christian, Ulimengo!" the old man cried. "It is a religion for slaves, and thou art a freeman! Take thy cleaver and smite thine enemy—thus!"

Abed grasped the cleaver which lay upon the meat block and raising it, stepped forward wildly towards Livingstone. I do not know whether he really intended to strike the good doctor. Livingstone stood unflinchingly as I hastened to hold back the old man's arm without difficulty and took the cleaver from his hand. The Arab shuddered and hunched his shoulders, and without giving us another glance scuttled away into the darkness.

Ulimengo said he was very sorry

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then and wanted to kiss my feet, but I would not let him. I walked Livingstone back to his tent and said good night, then checked the camp and saw the sentries posted before I settled myself down to sleep . . .

And all the time the man who tried to murder Livingstone at Ujiji was accompanying the caravan and was soon to strike again—under tragically strange circumstances.

As I mentioned, we had travelling with us a German ivory merchant called Weyerhauser, a stout, middle-aged man with a red, arrogant face bearing a duelling scar upon his cheek. Although I do not think he was signally successful, there was a self-important air about him. He spoke English perfectly and most of the time his manners were flawless; he was a most observant man, and even though I never once heard him address a native except in formal German, nor unbend enough to use an African proper name, he was well aware of all the little plots and subtle relationships that spring up between native carriers upon a journey such as ours.

Weyerhauser's one passion seemed to be Livingstone. He would follow the doctor about the camp with a Bible in his hand, two or three fingers stuck between various sections of the New Testament, quizzing the older man relentlessly about possible esoteric interpretations until Livingstone, the most patient of men, fled discreetly to the sanctuary of his tent.

But even here the doctor was not safe. At times Weyerhauser, whose affection was most possessive, became even bolder and chose to regard Livingstone's tent as his own, especially as a kind of waiting room if the doctor were absent. Then he would sit at the doctor's folding table, reading the Bible aloud or singing hymns in a quavering baritone.

One night during the second week of our trek, as we camped by the Mtembo River, and Livingstone and I talked glowingly of the great explorers Speke and Baker, a hideous cry arose from above the animal chatter of the jungle night. For a moment we sat paralyzed. Then Livingstone pointed to his tent, and before he could rise I seized a burning faggot from the fire and ran down the camp "street". The doctor's tent was dark within, and I threw back the flap and thrust the torch inside.

At once I saw a man's body, fully clothed, thrashing about upon Livingstone's cot. At first he had his back to me, and from the middle of it and a little to the left side, protruded the hilt of a yellow, ivory-handled knife. The next instant with another agonized cry, the man sat part-way up and twisted towards me until I could see his face. It was Weyerhauser.

"Old man—!" he gasped, then he slumped forward and his head

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hung half-way to the ground. By the time I seized him and laid him gently back upon his side he was dead. Livingstone had entered the tent and lit the lamp upon the table and I extinguished the faggot.

I removed the knife from the dead man's back and examined it. The ivory handle had carved arabesques upon it and the blade was faintly serpentine.

"Arab craftsmanship," I said. "And the handle is oily, so it looks as if this were done by the same slippery character who visited you in Ujiji—namely, Abed bin Suliman!"

But Livingstone, standing soberly at the table, removed his blue-clothed, gold-banded hat and shook his head.

"No, it does not make sense, Mr. Stanley," he said.

"But his last words were 'the old man.' Who else could he mean but Abed?"

"Not that. Why should *Weyerhauser* be murdered?"

"He must have been waiting for you, got tired, and lay down on the cot. Suliman crept in here and mistook the German for you."

"No, no, that couldn't be true! I was watching my tent as we sat talking by the camp fire. The lamp was lit and I knew Weyerhauser was here, waiting for me. It was extinguished barely seconds before he cried out."

"He must have turned it out just before he lay down."

"No, he would never go so far as to lie down upon my cot. And besides, if someone were watching for his opportunity to murder me, *he would keep track of my whereabouts*. Certainly he would be aware that for the past hour I was talking with you in front of the fire, in view of the entire camp! No, Mr. Stanley, whoever murdered Mr. Weyerhauser knew definitely who his victim was. I think he murdered him while he sat at this table, *and then threw him upon my cot to make us think that I was the intended object of his attack*."

"Then there's all the more reason to take Weyerhauser's word it was the old man, the Arab Suliman, who attacked him," I said. "The reasoning behind such a subterfuge is too subtle for a native black."

As Livingstone nodded his agreement there came a sudden stirring at the rear of the tent and an instant later the edge was raised and a dim face peered in at us. I had my Colt Repeater in my hand at once.

"No, no, senhor, don't shoot! It is only I!" The Portuguese slave trader Goiaz crept into the tent and stood up. "I was walking behind the camp and heard a stirring in the brush," he explained, smiling. "At first I thought it was an animal, but the grunting was too human, and I tried to follow the sound. By the time I reached the tent whoever it was had gone, but I saw the bushes matted there and I investigated."

So intent was Goiaz upon his ex-

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planation that only when he finished did his eye fall upon the shadowed figure upon the cot. At the sight he crossed himself, then sat down upon the bench as if his leg muscles were cut.

"My God," he murmured. "Senhor Weyerhauser!"

"Goiaz," I said sharply, "as the commander of this caravan I am about to give you an order. Go at once to the tent of Abed bin Suliman and bring him here. Use force if necessary and do not let him escape."

The Portuguese blinked at me, his eyes becoming suddenly shrewd and self-possessed.

"How could he escape—where would be go alone—in this wilderness? Very well, I will get him."

And he left the tent.

Meanwhile Livingstone stood looking down soberly at the table. "I do not like this," he murmured. "Why did Weyerhauser wait for me in my tent?"

"Did he not discuss religion with you, Doctor?"

"Always. Never once did he visit me here on secular matters."

"Well, then—"

"But have you not observed, Mr. Stanley, Weyerhauser's Bible is not in the tent!"

"Perhaps under his body—"

"I have looked."

"Could the murderer have taken the Bible with him?"

"For what reason?"

I thought a moment. "Then perhaps for once Weyerhauser came without his Bible—to speak to you of a non-religious matter."

"Precisely. And considering the *kind* of man Mr. Weyerhauser was, that is what I do not like about this!"

I could see that Livingstone was reading some grim threat into the circumstances, and the troubled way he looked at me caused me to suspect that perhaps I, too, would be included in that danger. But before he could clarify his fears Goiaz burst into the tent, his face contorted with terror.

"Abed bin Suliman!" he choked, and could not get his words out until I slapped him fervently upon the back.

"What about him?" I demanded.

"He's dead! Lying in his own blood on the ground in his tent!"

"Dead!"

"Suicide. He has hold of the knife in his chest." Goiaz pointed at the ivory-handled knife lying upon the table. "It's the same as that one!"

I glanced my astonishment at Livingstone and saw he was gazing in a sort of reflective fascination upon the cuff of Goiaz's shirt sleeve.

Then I had to look twice at the Portuguese before I saw that the dark wet stain around his white sleeve button was blood . . .

I insisted that as little ado should be made about the deaths as possible so as not to alarm my people. They were a superstitious lot and easily

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excited, and I gave it out that Weyerhausers and Suliman had caught the same white man's disease—not transmissible to Africans—and had died suddenly. Chuma and Ulimengo the cook assisted with the digging of the graves close by the river and Livingstone swore them to silence about how the two had died.

Neither Livingstone nor I believed that Abed had committed suicide. True, the Arab grasped the hilt of the knife in his chest and lay fallen forward upon his prayer rug where he would most likely commit such an act; but his body was stiffened with rigor mortis, which in this warm climate meant that he had died hours earlier, perhaps just after the evening meal, and long before Weyerhauser was murdered. Moreover, not only was the knife of identical workmanship with the one that had killed Weyerhauser, but the hilt was likewise oily.

"I touched Abed to see if he was dead," Goiaz explained as we stood in Suliman's tent after the burial. "That's how I must have received the blood upon my sleeve."

We had no choice but to accept his story, but I resolved to keep a close watch upon the Portuguese and set Ulimengo—who after Livingstone's scolding was most tractable—and Chuma to take turns doing it.

After Goiaz left us Livingstone and I sorted through the Arab's effects and at first found nothing more enlightening than articles of clothing, some money, and a copy of the Koran. But then at the bottom of a wicker basket I discovered a horrifying figurine grossly carved out of ivory. It represented an obese black giant with a distended belly and open mouth, holding in either hand a minute figure of a black warrior, complete with spear and shield.

At the sight of it Livingstone turned his face away and murmured something I did not catch, and I hastily returned the cannibalistic fetich to the basket.

We also searched Weyerhauser's tent, where everything seemed to be in precise order and where we found his copy of the Bible. Livingstone sank down upon the German's cot and his face looked drawn and tired.

"You should have left me in Ujiji, as I asked," he said wearily. "Now I fear that my presence has placed you and all the others in great danger."

"How do you make that out, Doctor?"

"We have been on the march for close to two weeks. At any time, in spite of the guard you placed before my tent each night, this murderer could have struck."

"Perhaps he's been simply afraid to try."

"I would have thought so too, but for poor Weyerhauser. He was a very observant man. He knew I was in danger and was in great concern about me. Doubtless he wit-

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nessed something in the camp that he thought I should know about for my own safety. That is why he came privately to my tent. But someone knew his intention and followed him—killed him to prevent disclosure. *Someone who was not afraid to enter the tent when he knew it was under surveillance from the camp fire, and a cry would bring instant discovery.* One so bold certainly would not have feared to murder me at some time within the past two weeks. *That must mean he was not ready.* He killed Weyerhauser to prevent the miscarriage of a much bigger plan!"

"What sort of plan?"

"I didn't know until I saw the fetich in Suliman's tent. It comes from Mirambo, the Ugala chief whom we are trying to circumvent. He has great plans of conquest and doubtless fears my peaceful influence in Uuha where he has been trying to recruit warriors. These terrible figurines he gives as a mark of favor to his agents—those he pays well to incite natives to attack European caravans."

"Then Suliman was an agent?" I cried.

"Yes, and there must still be his confederate walking freely about the camp—his murderer and Weyerhauser's. Mirambo employs Arabs and Portuguese alike, because they are more adept at strategy against the white man than his own warlike but simple people."

"Then Goiaz—!"

"It could only be he who has cleverly maneuvered us this far. All the rest of the caravan, besides you and me, are untutored natives."

I leaped to the tent entrance at once.

"Chuma and Ulimengo are in danger," I said. "I shall put Goiaz under armed guard at once."

"Perhaps it is already too late. He could have made his plans long since."

"What plans?"

"Why, I thought it was clear, Mr. Stanley. His plans to destroy not only me but the entire caravan as well!"

I knew Livingstone was right the following day when we entered the southernmost limits of the Ugala country. Not only did a presentiment of evil seem to possess the entire caravan, but the small villages we came to were deserted, while from the brush issued wild, ululating cries that warned others of our coming for miles ahead.

I glanced back at Goiaz, marching sullenly, flanked by two armed Zanzibaris. Harmless now, I thought, but doubtless he had already slipped ahead and made his pact with the naked, hostile savages, and now they would be gathering for a direct onslaught.

For the next three days there were sly attacks upon the perimeter of our company. A sick man suffering from asthma lingered behind, unknown to the rear guard. The sav-

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ages pounced on him and hacked him to pieces. Two fuel-gatherers were attacked: one was speared to death and the other rushed into camp, a lance quivering in his arms, his body gashed with flying weapons, his face streaming with blood from the blow of a whirling knobstick.

And then, as we reached the village of Kalembega and found it deserted, an arrow hummed down from the surrounding hills and pierced my left shoulder to the bone. Livingstone, who had been prostrated by the heat during a twenty-eight mile trek in the hot sun, ordered Chuma to care for me at once.

The Negro was as gentle as a mother caring for her child. He bled the wound carefully, ordered Ulimengo to gather the purplish Tubosa Root from a nearby marsh; these he pressed between flat stones and poured the resulting liquid, dark and viscous, over my entire shoulder staining it at once, whereupon I laughed and said I never had so dark a sunburn. Chuma next rubbed goat's grease over the wound, to prevent the Tubosa dye from burning the skin, he said, and bound up the shoulder in white bandages from our medical store.

Once more upon my feet, I ordered the caravan out of the village and we fortified ourselves upon a treed hillock in the open plain. It was there while we fenced the camp around with bush and built four towers, twenty feet high to command all sides, that Goiaz took advantage of our preoccupation with defense and made a dash for the open country beyond us. Ulimengo, more alert than the Zanzibaris, saw him run through the gates of our enclosure, and set up a cry.

"Come back, Ulimengo!" I called. "The savages will get you!"

But it was not the savages who did for Ulimengo. Goiaz turned, flourishing a Colt Repeater he had taken with him in his escape.

"Stay back!" he cried.

But Ulimengo kept on following. Goiaz shot once and the cook collapsed as if someone had drawn pins out of his legs. The next moment Goiaz was running again and presently he disappeared into the jungle that fringed the plain. I sent a porter out to bring back Ulimengo. He was not mortally hurt, but had a deep wound in his side where the bullet had creased him, and I had Chuma dress it at once.

That night as I sat with Livingstone, who was feeling better, beside the camp fire, and the country all about was filled with strange rustlings and pseudo-animal cries, I said, "Well, at least the enemy in our midst is gone."

"Yes," Livingstone said, looking about him. "These are simple people. You may expect disobedience and childish willfullness from them, and even occasionally outright lying and stealing, but they are incapable of devious strategy."

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"Why do you suppose Goiaz killed Suliman?"

"Suliman was a fanatic; look how he tried to kill me. But a successful agent must be self-controlled. Perhaps Goiaz thought him a hazard."

"It is good to be rid of Goiaz," I sighed.

We talked a while longer and then with my good arm I helped Livingstone walk to his tent. It was dark inside, and I had barely lit the lamp when an exclamation from the doctor caused me to turn and I saw him trembling and pointing to ground.

There lay Chuma, his servant, upon his back, his dead eyes staring in the lamplight. And from his chest protruded the ivory hilt of an Arabian knife . . .

The truth came to me in the middle of the night, so suddenly that I sat up with a cry. I rose and dressed quickly and stumbled through the camp "street" to Livingstone's tent. My heart froze when I saw that the two guards I had posted before its entrance lay snoring loudly upon the ground, empty cups still grasped in their hands. Doubtless they had drunk drugged wine.

Praying fervently, I seized a faggot from the camp fire and threw back the tent flap. Inside, Livingstone lay alone, sleeping quietly upon his cot. Thankfully I extinguished the faggot, closed the entrance, crept quietly to Livingstone's side, and shook him gently by the shoulder.

"Quiet, Doctor, it's Stanley," I whispered in the darkness. "I know who our murderer is. He plans, I think, to try to murder you to-night. The guards are asleep. Do not worry, I have my gun ready."

"Who is it?" Livingstone asked, fully alert.

"Hark! I think I hear someone coming. Yes, it must be he."

The dried grass crackled beneath someone's tread. He stopped just outside the tent—to make sure, probably, that the guards were deeply asleep. Then the flaps of the tent were pulled cautiously aside and a figure stood outlined in the opening.

"Don't move, or I'll shoot you dead," I said quietly.

The figure stiffened, then let out a bellow of frustrated rage and pushed forward like an enraged rhinosceros, hoping doubtless to cut me down before I had time to fire. But he had not gone two steps before I shot. He grunted and went down, so heavily that I felt the wind of his fall, and the ground trembled with the impact of his body.

"Who is it, Mr. Stanley?" Livingstone cried.

"Have you not guessed?" I asked, fumbling with the box of sulphur matches. "Ulimengo, of course." Then I lighted the lamp and we both looked down in silence upon

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the dead cook lying between us . . .

"When all the whites but you and I were gone and still another murder was committed, I had only one line of thought open to me," I explained to Livingstone a few minutes later in the tent, after the porters had removed Ulimengo's body. "I knew someone must be *posing as a Negro.* Then I remembered how the juice of the Tubosa Root dyed my skin black. Why shouldn't someone have used that method? Remember Chuma said he had to use goat's grease to keep the dye from burning the skin? Thus the oil upon the murderer's body.

"Once I settled that in my mind I looked around for a bogus Negro. Who could it be? I awoke just now with the answer. Weyerhauser himself gave it to us. His last words, we thought, were 'Old man.' But he was merely starting to pronounce the cook's name, slurring the 'i' a bit so that it came out 'oo-i-men', and died before he could finish."

"But why did Ulimengo kill Chuma?" Livingstone asked.

"Chuma took care of his wound, didn't he? He probably discovered that Ulimengo was not a black. By the way, I took a close look at Ulimengo's features and I'm certain now that he was an Arab."

"I should have seen that."

"If the sun had not prostrated you—" I suggested.

"Thank you, Mr. Stanley. What I began you have finished. Now all we have to worry about is two thousand savages at our heels."

"Never fear, Doctor Livingstone. We shall take care of that, too."

And we did. The savages attacked at daybreak and we drove them back into the brush by mid-morning, firing their villages as we took them.

Then, too, we left Ulimengo's body in a clearing for them to find.

As Doctor Livingstone expressed it, "Alive, Ulimengo was our enemy, dead he is our friend."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT S. ALDRICH**

TITLE: ***The Day of the Boar***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: San Francisco

TIME: A certain day of the year

COMMENTS: *A delightfully amusing story by the son of the late Bess Streeter Aldrich . . . a modern comedy of errors that could have happened only on the worst day of the year . . .*

ONCE A YEAR THERE COMES A DAY when everything gets turned upside down. Machinery works contrary to the way it's designed to work; water runs uphill; people who start out to go north find themselves going south instead; and people with excellent memories cannot recall the name of the lifelong friend who sent the lovely fruit from Florida last Christmas.

This day doesn't arrive at a certain time, like Valentine's Day or the Fourth of July. If it did, we could be prepared for it. It may come any time. It might be today or tomorrow, or it might not be until December thirty-first. You never know.

You see, the thing began somewhere around 400 A.D., when some people with names like Gnnyf and Furwald and Eric the Brutal were raiding up and down the seacoast of England, killing each other off with axes and broadswords and generally being pretty nasty. Some of these people happened to chop off the head of somebody who turned out to be a close relative of an old witch. This hag got furious and whipped up a batch of broth from one of her mother's recipes; it included toads' heads, frogs' ears, and one heaping teaspoon of bane. She fed this stuff to her enemies, killing them all quite dead; but even this didn't satisfy her. She stayed up after the late-late revelries, moaning incantations, and calling upon the powers of darkness to punish the descendants of these warriors by legislating one day a year when everything would go wrong.

And that is why tomorrow, or

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next week, or maybe a week from Tuesday, the lead will snap in every pencil you pick up, all your telephone calls will be wrong numbers, and the gentlest remark to your loved ones or associates will be interpreted as a gross insult.

The Day of the Boar, it's called. I don't know why.

Anyway, on the most recent Day of the Boar, early in the morning, two professional thieves were busy robbing a jewelry store in San Francisco. Their names were Jake Kofwalowitcz and Curly O'Shaughnessy and they were ambitious, hard-working men. They had planned this caper very carefully, making sure of no slip-up. It wasn't Jake's and Curly's fault that they happened to pick the worst day of the year.

At approximately the same time, across the Bay from the City by the Golden Gate, in a place called Berkeley, a visiting professor of English literature by the name of Dr. Loren T. Trimble was polishing his notes for a lecture he was to give that morning before a ladies' book-reading group. The ladies, too, had picked the worst day of the year for their meeting, but they could hardly be expected to know that, since the Day of the Boar is not listed on any calendar.

And on the same morning Jeffrey Smith, a young Navy ensign, just off his ship which was docked at Alameda for repairs, was looking forward to meeting his sweetheart whose name was Alice Carter. They were both nice young people, good to look at, and very much in love, and there really isn't a great deal more to be said about where they went to school and how they happened to meet and all that kind of goop.

Well, things went awry for almost everybody everywhere that day, it being the Day of the Boar. A rocket shot off at Cape Canaveral fell right back down on the ground, plop, for no reason the experts could determine. The Russians had trouble, too, getting their double-think mixed up and saying *da* when they meant *nyet* and grinning like Rotarians when they'd intended to scowl. As for our State Department, things were in an awful mess there, and at the Pentagon there was hardly a stack of papers delivered to the right office for signature, or a visitor who didn't get lost in the maze of corridors and who didn't have to be found and led away by kindly guides. Even the guides were confused and some of them broke down and wept and had to be sent home. Doctors were giving their patients pep-up pills when they'd meant to prescribe tranquilizers, and people who had been ordered to stay in bed went skiing or were living it up in night clubs. It went like that all day.

Early morning in the jewelry store Curly O'Shaughnessy was busy tying up the night watchman

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while Jake Kofwalowitcz dumped handfuls of diamonds into an open suitcase. They had to hurry because it was almost time for the store to open for business.

Curly, a husky ex-prizefighter who never won any prizes, was not the brightest thief in town and he was very nervous about the job. Jake was content with the way things were running. This was going to be their best haul of the year, and if the cops stuck to their routine, and the store manager didn't decide to open up early, and if the fence didn't double-cross him, and the car didn't break down, and Jake's ulcers didn't get any worse, the day promised to be a memorable one in the annals of crime.

Jake wished the boys back at San Quentin could see him now. He had been a quiet, well-behaved little con. Those loudmouths on his cell row and the screws, even the warden, thought Jake was meek and spineless. Just because he'd never carried a gun and preferred to avoid fist fights, they thought he was a nobody. Well, he'd show them now! Jake turned over a particularly large and lovely diamond and smiled with the satisfaction of the connoisseur. They'd have to split that one to sell it, but he knew where it could be done.

Curly left the night watchman—who was making sounds like "mmmfff" and "nnnn"—and hurried to a front window. He peered out.

"Get the hell away from that window!" Jake ordered.

"Let's step on it, Jake," Curly said. "I got a feelin'—I don't know, I just got a feelin' we ought to lam out."

"You got a feelin'," Jake sneered.

"When I woke up this morning," Curly said, "somethin' just told me, stay right in bed." Curly was shaking all over.

"Well, somethin' better tell you to help me get this bag shut," Jake said. Jake thought to himself, *"Amateurs!"* The profession was going to seed. You couldn't hardly find a good man any more. It was, he'd decided, something about the way kids were being brought up these days: they had no respect for authority, no willingness to accept advice. Take his own son, for instance: Harry was a bright enough kid but he had no stability. He wanted to go to college or be a movie actor—anything but settle down and learn the heisting trade. Oh, well, you had to let them live their own lives, he supposed. At least Harry wasn't as dumb as Curly here, the big baboon. All the old-timers were dead or in stir or they had gone into politics or something.

"Okay," Jake said, picking up the suitcase. "Let's cut out." Curly made a beeline for the rear of the store. Jake summoned him back. "How many times I got to tell you," he stormed, "look around, make sure you ain't left any calling

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cards. You want to make life easy for the fuzz?"

Curly grinned sheepishly. "Sure, Jake. Guess I forgot. Cheez, there's so much to remember. I always thought pickin' up this glass was easy."

"Well, it ain't," Jake said, and there was the pride of years in his voice. "You got to plan right down to the last detail. You'd have forgotten to put gas in the car if I hadn't reminded you."

Curly's round face collapsed. "Jake," he said weakly, "I—I did forget. I didn't put no gas in."

Jake turned pale. "You-didn't-put-no-gas-in? Oh, you dumb—" Jake used a naughty word. "What are we going to do, leave it set out there in the alley?" His pallor fled, replaced by a purplish hue. He was a good foot shorter than Curly but now, as he raised a clenched fist, Curly backed into a showcase. "I ought to clobber you!" Jake snarled. "I ought to leave you here with that night dick. I ought—oh, never mind. Come on, let's go."

They got out. Jake, in the lead, was in such a hurry that he didn't bother to examine Curly's tying job on the night watchman. The man stared at them with frightened eyes. It was daylight, a nice, wet foggy San Francisco morning. Jake tossed the suitcase in the trunk and peered in at the gas guage. "Holy Sam!" he said. "I bet there ain't enough in there to get us around the corner."

Curly was more than anxious to pay for his error. "I'll go see if there's a station open," he volunteered.

"Oh, sure, and leave me standing here with these hot stones in the car. What do I say when the bulls stick their noses around here —'I just happened to be driving up this alley'? Only one thing left to do." Jake lifted the suitcase out of the trunk. "We've got to hoof it. The car's stole, anyhow, so with any kind of break we ought to be in the clear before they pick it up."

Curly continued to mumble apologies as they edged into the street. A misty rain was falling. Jake's ulcers were starting to bite. "With my record," Jake mumbled, "and me right out here in the open, carryin' the ice. Holy Sam!"

A taxi came around the corner, its brakes squealing. Curly's face brightened. "How about we hail a cab?" he suggested.

"No cab," Jake said. "I don't want any cabbie fingering me. No, we got to change our plans, all on account of that doorknob head of yours."

"Cheez," Curly said, "I'm sorry, Jake. You want I should carry the bag a while?"

"Oh shut up," Jake snarled.

A couple of hours after the two men of crime began their flight, Ensign Smith got in touch with Alice Carter by telephone. When they had exchanged a few endearments and

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had made plans to meet downtown in order to save time, Alice gave a little laugh.

"Listen," she told Jeffrey, "will you do me a favor? I did an awfully dumb thing last night. I was driving Tom's car"—Tom was Alice's brother— "and I ran out of gas."

She mentioned the address near which she had left the car. "I had to leave it in an alley. It's probably got a ticket, if the police haven't hauled it away. Would you be nice and get it for me? The key's inside." She asked him to drive the car to a downtown garage and leave it there.

Shortly before this phone call the manager opened up the jewelry store and found he'd been cleaned out. He untied his night watchman and telephoned for the police. Sirens shrieked. Policemen swarmed over the store and into a nearby alley. They found the thieves' getaway car and went over it carefully for fingerprints.

Ensign Smith, in search of Alice's brother's car, got his directions slightly wrong. He found a car in an alley and drove off with it. He should have looked at the registration card, but he thought he recognized the car; besides, he was in a hurry, and his mind was on other things.

A few minutes later the police found the car missing. A captain bawled out a rookie for not watching it. Within half an hour, alert prowl-car men had located the car in a downtown garage. They obtained a description of the young Navy officer who had driven it there.

"A Navy man?" The police captain scratched his chin. "Okay, find him, but don't bring him in. Put a tail on him. He might lead us to the rest of the mob."

Ensign Smith, unaware that he was wanted for car theft and suspicion of robbery, went happily to the big downtown hotel where he was to meet his fiancée.

Dr. Loren T. Trimble was finishing his breakfast in the home of his host, a departmental dean. As he nibbled a piece of toast, Dr. Trimble made notes in a looseleaf notebook, using a tiny gold pen. His host sipped coffee and kept a respectful silence.

Finally Dean Motley peered over his glasses and coughed, disturbing the creative quiet. Dr. Trimble glanced up, his thin-lipped smile softening the sharpness of a fine-boned, sensitive face. "One really ought not to do this sort of thing at the breakfast table," he murmured.

"Quite all right," Dean Motley assured him. "I feel it's an imposition on you, Dr. Trimble, this lecture on such short notice. But the ladies were most insistent. Your new book is a significant landmark." His fingers touched a copy of *New Sources in the Mainstream*

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of American Literature, a thin volume lying on the table.

"One hopes one's remarks will be of some interest," said Dr. Trimble.

"One—I mean, I'm sure they will be," said Dean Motley. "Personally, I found your chapter on *Finnegans Wake* most absorbing."

Mrs. Motley, who was also present, glanced up at a clock and cleared her throat.

"Oh, yes," Dean Motley said. "We'd better get started."

Mrs. Motley brought Dr. Trimble his homburg, his gloves, and his dark-blue topcoat.

"Oh, by the way," Dean Motley remarked as they were leaving the house, "I'm sorry no one from the Department will be there to introduce you. If you'll just make yourself known to the chairman, she'll take over."

Dean Trimble nodded and smiled. The lecture platform held no terrors for him.

At ten o'clock Ensign Smith, being too restless to sit, was strolling around the lobby of the downtown hotel, trying to kill time until Alice's arrival. He was happy and unhappy at the same time, a condition not unknown to people in love. He was happy about seeing Alice and pleased that she had promised to marry him, but he was afraid she was going to blow her pretty top when he told her he'd decided to stay in the Navy.

Alice hated the Navy. She wanted him to go into her father's business. He had never said so, but privately he would rather swim to Honolulu than work for her old man.

So he strolled around nervously and glanced every now and then at the big clock over the desk, and then at the revolving doors. Once or twice he bumped into a couple of big, beefy men who seemed to be always going where he was, but he paid no attention to them.

The Ensign's wandering took him past the entrance to a room where some kind of meeting was apparently starting. A sign on a tripod said, *Wednesday Literary Discussion Club.* A young woman tried to hand him a pamphlet which he declined with a smile.

Ensign Smith then went into the men's room. He took off his bridge coat and hung it on a wall peg while he brushed his jacket, straightened his tie, and combed his hair. A little thin man came in, hung his topcoat on another peg; Ensign Smith noticed that the man had a book under his arm. Over in a corner two men, one of them big and built like a boxer or wrestler, were carrying on a conversation in low tones.

Jake, glancing briefly at the young Navy officer, whispered, "Get rid of the suitcase?"

Curly nodded. "Dumped it down the shaft like you said."

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Jake produced a lumpy brown-paper bag, tied with string. "Okay, I got the best stones in here. The heck with the rest of them." He went to the Men's Room door and peered out. "Holy Sam!" he said as he swung around. "Those two plainclothes dicks are still out there. They must have spotted us coming in." Jake gave Curly a nudge. "Go say something to that Navy guy."

"What'll I say?"

"Anything. Just talk to him."

Curly went over to Ensign Smith. "You got a match on you, Admiral?" he asked.

Behind the ensign's back Jake hurriedly stuffed the brown-paper bag into the pocket of the coat that hung there. Then he grabbed Curly and hustled him outside. If the cops searched them, Jake explained, they would be clean, but it was imperative that Curly now follow the Navy man and not lose him.

In a moment Ensign Smith emerged from the Men's Room. Jake winked at Curly who started after the ensign.

In the Men's Room, Dr. Loren Trimble took his coat from the wall and carried it over his arm. He did not look in the pocket of his coat and he did not notice the paper bag that had been put there because of a slight error on Jake's part.

The two plainclothesmen saw Jake and they grinned at each other. As they drew close, Curly became alarmed and ducked behind a pillar. The cops didn't notice Curly. They were interested in Jake.

"Well," said one of the cops, blocking Jake's progress, "if it ain't Jake the Glass Man."

"Morning," said Jake, shaking slightly. "What's new?"

"Somebody tipped over Mueller's Jewelry Store," the cop said. "Wrapped up the night man like a Christmas package. Did a very thorough job. Just like your m. o., Jake."

"I been out of town," Jake said. "Just got back."

Beyond the bulky form of the cop Jake saw Ensign Smith. Jake felt mouse-trapped. If the Navy guy got away with those stones, they might be gone forever. He couldn't see Curly anywhere. As Jake watched, a very pretty blonde came in and the Navy guy ran toward her and grabbed her up in his arms. He kissed her and the blonde hugged him as if he were the last man alive.

"We think it'd be nice," the big cop was saying, "if you'd come down to headquarters and have a chat."

"You got nothin' on me," Jake protested.

The cop grinned. "The night watchman, Jake. He got a good look at you as you were leaving. Somebody did a poor job taping his eyes."

Jake's heart sank, plummeting like a rock dropped into a well.

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He'd been in a hurry, he hadn't bothered to check Curly's work, he might have known. There was nobody to blame but himself. He saw the gates of Q opening wide.

"Where's that big ape you came in here with?" the cop said. "And whose the guy in the Navy officer's uniform that went back and picked up the car? You might as well spill it all now."

The last question puzzled and alarmed Jake. He didn't know what the cop meant. The reference to a Navy officer made him think of the boodle. But none of that mattered now—the mistake with the night watchman had ruined everything. And suddenly Jake saw something that made him blink.

A little thin man with a book under his arm was taking a bag out of his coat pocket. As Jake looked again, the little man emptied a pile of glittering diamonds into the palm of his hand. One stone rolled on the floor, almost at the feet of the cops. The little man bent down and picked it up. Jake realized he'd stuck the package in the wrong coat and at the same instant he saw a way to take five, maybe ten, years off his sentence.

He talked fast. One cop took out a notebook and wrote it all down. Sure, he'd been in on the Mueller job, said Jake, but only helping out, see? This guy from out of town needed a local man to case the joint, see?

The little thin man, clutching the bag, was moving toward the desk; obviously he was going to turn the stones over to the hotel clerk. Jake started after him with the cop grabbing his arm.

"There he is!" Jake said. "Right there! The big op from Kansas City! Grab him, quick! He's got the stuff on him."

"Don't give us that, Jake!" the cop growled. He swung around to look at the little man who was now beckoning the desk clerk. The two cops exchanged glances.

"So help me, Jake," said the big cop grimly, "if you're faking and I get nailed for a false arrest, I'll take it out of your hide!"

Dr. Loren Trimble, the paper bag in his hand, looked up in surprise at the heavy-set man who grasped him affectionately by the elbow.

"Oh," said Dr. Trimble, "you must be my welcoming committee. I was rather expecting a lady."

Curly's mind was a sea of bewilderment. He knew only one emotion, fear, and one urge, flight. When he'd seen the cops corner Jake, he'd realized his responsibility and followed the Navy guy as far as the coffee shop.

There was a blonde with the Navy guy. Curly had started after them, but then a uniformed policeman appeared in the corridor. In terror Curly bought a copy of the *Examiner* and held it in front of his face. Now he was too scared

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to go into the coffee shop. Anyway, the boodle didn't seem to matter so much any more.

If they nabbed Jake, he wouldn't know what to do with all that glass. Curly wished he'd never got himself into this. He wished he'd stayed in the fight game. Twelve fights, and only four times he'd been knocked out, and he wasn't doing so bad. But, no, he had to go crazy for money. And here he was in a hotel swarming with cops, all the entrances probably guarded, and Jake probably in cuffs by this time.

A large group of women, fashionably dressed, crossed the lobby. Curly almost ran into them. They gathered around him, wafting the odors of face powder and perfumes into his nostrils. Curly started to step aside, but they kept coming at him and finally he turned and went along with them, swept like driftwood on the tide. In the midst of this confusion Curly noticed that one of the ladies had dropped a book.

Merely out of habit, Curly picked it up. Sometimes people dropped things that were worth retrieving. He held it up so its owner could have it back if she wanted it, but nobody even looked at him. He was going to toss the book away and then he remembered something Jake had once said. When you're on the lam, stick a book under your arm; nobody, Jake said, ever fingers a guy with a book.

A narrow back stairway looked like a possible route of escape. At the top of the landing Curly tried a door. It was locked. There was another door but he sensed that it would not lead him to the outside. He started down the steps just as a covey of females came into view.

"Oh, this isn't the way!" one of them shrieked. "The other way, girls." And they vanished—all but one.

She was a big fat dame with flowers in her hat. She blocked Curly's way. She took a pair of glasses from her nose and peered up at him. She said something that sounded like "Owbegyapardon!" She waved the glasses which were on a string. "Would you be the gentleman we're looking for?"

Curly felt the salt taste of panic in his mouth. He reasoned that this dame was no cop, but still he didn't want to tangle with her. He moved to brush past her, but she wouldn't budge. "Your name?" she said. "What is your name?"

Curly at least had sense enough not to say "Curly O'Shaughnessy." He tried to think of a name but his mind was erased clean of thought. In desperation he turned over the book in his hand and pronounced the name he saw there. "Loren H. Trimble," Curly said, and seeing the next letters, *Ph.D.*, he added, "Fuhd."

"Oh, good heavens!" the lady cried. "We've been looking high and low for you!" She stuck a fing-

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er at him and the flowers on her hat dipped and bobbed. "In there, Dr. Trimble, right through that door. They're all waiting for you!"

The dame was making such a noise that three or four other dames suddenly joined her. Their appearance made Curly change his mind about charging down the stairs. "No, no," the fat one was saying, "the door to your *right*. Go right in. That's a dear!"

Curly got the door open and went in. The feeling of relief that filled him at getting away from the fat dame lasted for only an instant. In front and below him was a vast throng of women, rows and rows of them. He was on some kind of little stage and there was a half circle of women sitting on chairs. They turned around and stared.

Curly made a leap for the door. The fat dame had her head poked through it. She gave him a push and pointed at him, nodding vigorously to the others.

Immediately the women on the stage rose to their feet, applauding, and then the door behind him was slammed shut. One woman shoved a chair under him and Curly sat down—rather, his legs gave out from under him.

The applause was deafening. All the women resumed their seats except for one who kept standing. She took a wooden mallet and banged on a table that held a vase of flowers and a water pitcher. And suddenly there was silence.

"Since we are late getting started," the dame at the table was saying, "I shall not take anymore time . . ."

Curley glanced down an aisle to the entrance and saw the uniformed cop standing there. He decided against making a run for it.

A woman sitting next to Curly leaned over and whispered, "You don't look at all like your photograph, Dr. Trimble—on the back of the book, I mean." Curly opened and shut his mouth, and the lady said, "Like passport photos, aren't they?"

The woman who was standing said, "Dr. Loren H. Trimble!"

Applause thundered and rolled and suddenly dames were nudging Curly. He sat frozen to the chair and the applause went on until, frightened, he stood up. Curly discovered that by sitting down and getting up again he could turn the applause on and off. It was kind of fun.

Suddenly he was calmer, almost happy. Jake was sure right about a guy with a book. Curly went over to the lectern and opened *New Sources in the Mainstream of American Literature*. He had never seen so many big words in his life. He cleared his throat and began to stumble through Chapter One. He noticed the cop at the door looking up respectfully.

In the audience a lady turned to a friend. "What makes him talk so funny?" she asked.

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Her friends hushed her. "It's—uh—Joycean, I think. I mean he's a student of the primitive Celtic and Anglo-Saxon . . ."

In the police building, Dr. Trimble, pale and trembling, was on the telephone. "Dean Motley?" he said. "Can you come at once? There's been a ghastly mistake . . ."

In another room Jake Kofwalowitcz told the Captain, "Okay, so I don't know no big op from Kansas City."

From the Top of the Mark, high above the city, Ensign Smith and Alice Carter watched the last wisps of fog drift away. They turned from the view, which you can buy on a post card for a dime, and looked into each other's eyes. What they saw there cannot be bought at any price.

"You really don't care?" he said.

"Of course not," she lied gallantly. "I love the Navy."

Some things cannot be messed up even on the worst day of the year—the Day of the Boar.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JACK LONDON**

TITLE: ***The Madness of John Harned***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Quito, Ecuador

TIME: Nearly 50 years ago

COMMENTS: *John Harned went to his first bull-fight for a curious reason—because he loved Maria Valenzuela; but the Ecuadorianos did not understand Harned—they thought him a savage, a primitive man . . .*

I TELL THIS FOR A FACT. IT HAPpened in the bull ring at Quito. I sat in the box with John Harned, and with Maria Valenzuela, and with Luis Cervallos. I saw it happen. I saw it all from first to last.

Maria Valenzuela is my cousin. I have known her always. She is very beautiful. I am a Spaniard—an Ecuadoriano, true, but I am descended from Pedro Patino, who was one of Pizarro's captains. I am Manuel de Jesus Patino. I own many haciendas, and ten thousand Indians are my slaves, though the law says they are free men who work by freedom of contract.

The law is a funny thing. We Ecuadorianos laugh at it. It is our law. We make it ourselves. I am Manuel de Jesus Patino. Remember that name. It will be written some day in history.

John Harned was an American. I met him first at the Tivoli Hotel in Panama. He had much money—this I have heard. He was going to Lima, but he met Maria Valenzuela in the Tivoli Hotel. Maria Valenzuela is the most beautiful woman in Ecuador. Always do all men look at her, and John Harned looked long at her at Panama.

He loved her, that I know for a fact. She was Ecuadoriano, true—but she was of all countries; she was of all the world. She spoke many languages. She sang—ah!

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like an artiste. Her smile—wonderful, divine. Her eyes—ah! have I not seen men look in her eyes? They were what you English call amazing. They were promises of paradise. Men drowned themselves in her eyes.

Maria Valenzuela was rich—richer than I, who am accounted very rich in Ecuador. But John Harned did not care for money. He had a heart—a funny heart. He was a fool. He did not go to Lima. He left the steamer at Guayaquil and followed her to Quito. She was coming home from Europe and other places. I do not see what she found in him, but she liked him. This I know for a fact, else he would not have followed her to Quito. She asked him to come. Well do I remember the occasion.

She said, "Come to Quito and I will show you the bull-fight—brave, clever, magnificent!"

But he said, "I go to Lima, not Quito. Such is my passage engaged on the steamer."

"You travel for pleasure—no?" said Maria Valenzuela; and she looked at him as only Maria Valenzuela could look, her eyes warm with the promise.

And he came. No; he did not come for the bullfight, even though Maria Valenzuela said, "You English people are—what shall I say? —savage—no? You prize-fight. Two men each hit the other with their fists till their eyes are blinded and their noses are broken. Hideous! And the other men who look on cry out loudly and are made glad. It is barbarous—no?"

"But they are men," said John Harned, "and they prize-fight out of desire. No one makes them prize-fight."

Maria Valenzuela—there was scorn in her smile as she said, "They kill each other often—is it not so? I have read it in the papers."

"But the bull," said John Harned. "The bull is killed many times in the bull-fight, and the bull does not come into the ring out of desire. It is not fair to the bull. He is compelled to fight. But the man in the prize-fight—no, he is not compelled."

"He is the more brute therefore," said Maria Valenzuela. "He is savage. He is primitive. He is animal. He strikes with his paws like a bear from a cave, and he is ferocious. But the bull-fight—ah! You have not seen the bull-fight—no? The toreador is clever. He must have skill. He is modern. He is romantic. He is only a man, soft and tender, and he faces the wild bull in conflict. And he kills with a sword, a slender sword, with one thrust, so, to the heart of the great beast. It is delicious. It makes the heart beat to behold—the small man, the great beast, the wide level sand, the thousands that look on without breath; the great beast rushes to the attack, the small man stands like a statue; he does not move, he is unafraid, and in his hand is the slen-

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der sword flashing like silver in the sun; nearer and nearer rushes the great beast with its sharp horns, the man does not move, and then—so—the sword flashes, the thrust is made, to the heart, to the hilt, the bull falls to the sand and is dead, and the man is unhurt. It is brave. It is magnificent! Ah!—I could love the toreador. But the man of the prize-fight—he is the brute, the human beast, the savage primitive, the maniac that receives many blows in his stupid face and rejoices. Come to Quito and I will show you the brave sport, the sport of men, the toreador and the bull."

But John Harned did not go to Quito for the bull-fight. He went because of Maria Valenzuela. He was a large man, more broad of shoulder than we Ecuadorianos, more tall, more heavy of limb and bone. True, he was larger even than most men of his own race. His eyes were blue, though I have seen them gray, and, sometimes, like cold steel. His features were large, too—not delicate like ours, and his jaw was very strong to look at. Also, his face was smooth-shaven like a priest's.

He was a quiet man. He talked always in a low voice, and he never moved his hands when he talked. One would have thought his heart was a piece of ice; yet did he have a streak of warm in his blood, for he followed Maria Valenzuela to Quito. Also, and for all that he talked low without moving his hands, he was an animal, as you shall see—the beast primitive, the stupid, ferocious savage of the long ago that dressed in wild skins and lived in the caves along with the bears and wolves.

Luis Cervallos is my friend, the best of Ecuadorianos. He owns three cacao plantations at Naranjito and Chobo. At Milagro is his big sugar plantation. He has large haciendas at Ambato and Latacunga, and down the coast is he interested in oil wells. Also has he spent much money in planting rubber along the Guayas.

He is modern, like the Yankee; and, like the Yankee, full of business. He has much money, but it is in many ventures, and ever he needs more money for new ventures and for the old ones. He does not like Americans. But he did like Maria Valenzuela, who was of his own country. Also, he needed her money for his ventures and for his gold mine in Eastern Ecuador where the painted Indians live.

I was his friend. It was my desire that he should marry Maria Valenzuela. Further, much of my money had I invested in his ventures, more so in his gold mine which was very rich but which first required the expense of much money before it would yield forth its riches. If Luis Cervallos married Maria Valenzuela I should have more money very immediately.

But John Harned followed Maria Valenzuela to Quito, and it was

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quickly clear to us—to Luis Cervallos and me—that she looked upon John Harned with great kindness. It is said that a woman will have her will, but this is a case not in point, for Maria Valenzuela did not have her will—at least, not with John Harned.

Perhaps it would all have happened as it did, even if Luis Cervallos and I had not sat in the box that day at the bull ring in Quito. But this I know: we *did* sit in the box that day. And I shall tell you what happened.

The four of us were in the one box, guests of Luis Cervallos. I was next to the Presidente's box. On the other side was the box of General José Eliceo Salazar. With him were Joaquin Endara and Urcisino Castillo, both generals, and Colonel Jacinto Fierro and Captain Baltazar de Echeverria. Only Luis Cervallos had the position and the influence to get that box next to the Presidente. I know for a fact that the Presidente himself expressed the desire that Luis Cervallos should have that box.

The band finished playing the national hymn of Ecuador. The procession of the toreadors was over. The Presidente nodded to begin. The bugles blew, and the bull dashed in—you know the way, excited, bewildered, the darts in its shoulder burning like fire, itself seeking madly whatever enemy to destroy. The toreadors hid behind their shelters and waited.

Suddenly they appeared forth, the capadors, five of them, from every side, their colored capes flinging wide. The bull paused at sight of such a generosity of enemies, unable in his own mind to know which to attack. Then advanced one of the capadores alone to meet the bull. The bull was very angry. With its forelegs it pawed the sand of the arena till the dust rose all about it. Then it charged, with lowered head, straight for the lone capador.

It is always of interest, the first charge of the first bull. After a time it is natural that one should grow tired, a trifle, that the keenness should lose its edge. But that first charge of the first bull! John Harned was seeing it for the first time, and he could not escape the excitement—the sight of the man, armed only with a piece of cloth, and of the bull rushing upon him across the sand with sharp horns, wide-spreading.

"See!" cried Maria Valenzuela. "Is it not superb?"

John Harned nodded, but did not look at her. His eyes were sparkling, and they were only for the bull ring. The capador stepped to the side, with a twirl of the cape eluding the bull and spreading the cape on his own shoulders.

"What do you think?" asked Maria Valenzuela. "Is it not a sporting proposition—no?"

"It is very clever," said John Harned.

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She clapped her hands with delight. They were little hands. The audience applauded. The bull turned and came back. Again the capadore eluded him, throwing the cape on his shoulders, and again the audience applauded. Three times did it happen. The capadore was very excellent. Then he retired, and the other capadore played with the bull.

After that they placed the banderillos in the bull, in the shoulders, on each side of the backbone, two at a time. Then stepped forward Ordonez, the chief matador, with the long sword and the scarlet cape. The bugles blew for the death. He is not so good as Matestini. Still he is good, and with one thrust he drove the sword to the heart, and the bull doubled his legs under him and lay down and died.

It was a pretty thrust, clean and sure; and there was much applause, and many of the common people threw their hats into the ring. Maria Valenzuela clapped her hands with the rest, and John Harned, whose cold heart was not touched by the event, looked at her with curiosity.

"You like it?" he asked.

"Always," she said, still clapping her hands.

"From a little girl," said Luis Cervallos. "I remember her first fight. She was four years old. She sat with her mother, and just like now she clapped her hands. She is a proper Spanish woman."

"You have seen it," said Maria Valenzuela to John Harned, as they fastened the mules to the dead bull and dragged it out. "You have seen the bull-fight and you like it—no? What do you think?"

"I think the bull had no chance," he said. "The bull was doomed from the first. The issue was not in doubt. Everyone knew, before the bull entered the ring, that it was to die. To be a sporting proposition, the issue must be in doubt. It was one stupid bull who had never fought a man against five wise men who had fought many bulls. It would be possibly a little bit fair if it were one man against one bull."

"Or one man against five bulls," said Maria Valenzuela; and we all laughed, and Luis Cervallos laughed loudest.

"Yes," said John Harned, "against five bulls, and the man, like the bulls, never in the bull ring before—a man like yourself, Senor Cervallos."

"Yet we Spanish like the bull-fight," said Luis Cervallos; and I swear the devil was whispering then in his ear, telling him to do that which I shall relate.

"Then must it be a cultivated taste," John Harned made answer. "We kill bulls by the thousand every day in Chicago, yet no one cares to pay admittance to see."

"That is butchery," said I; "but this—ah, this is an art. It is delicate. It is fine. It is rare."

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"Not always," said Luis Cervallos. "I have seen clumsy matadors, and I tell you it is not nice."

He shuddered, and his face betrayed such what-you-call disgust, that I knew, then, that the devil was whispering and that he was beginning to play a part.

"Senor Harned may be right," said Luis Cervallos. "It may not be fair to the bull. For is it not known to all of us that for twenty-four hours the bull is given no water, and that immediately before the fight he is permitted to drink his fill?"

"And he comes into the ring heavy with water?" said John Harned quickly; and I saw that his eyes were very gray and very sharp and very cold.

"It is necessary for the sport," said Luis Cervallos. "Would you have the bull so strong that he would kill the toreadors?"

"I would that he had a fighting chance," said John Harned, facing the ring to see the second bull come in.

It was not a good bull. It was frightened. It ran around the ring in search of a way to get out. The capadors stepped forth and flared their capes, but he refused to charge upon them.

"It is a stupid bull," said Maria Valenzuela.

"I beg pardon," said John Harned; "but it would seem to me a wise bull. He knows he must not fight man. See! He smells death."

True. The bull, pausing where the last one had died, was smelling the wet sand and snorting. Again he ran around the ring, with raised head, looking at the faces of the thousands that hissed him, that threw orange peel at him and called him names.

But the smell of blood decided him, and he charged a capador, so without warning that the man just escaped. He dropped his cape and dodged into the shelter. The bull struck the wall of the ring with a crash. And John Harned said, in a quiet voice, as though he talked to himself, "I will give one thousand sucres to the lazarhouse of Quito if a bull kills a man this day."

"You like bulls?" said Maria Valenzuela with a smile.

"I like such men less," said John Harned. "A toreador is not a brave man. He surely cannot be a brave man. See, the bull's tongue is already out. He is tired and he has not yet begun."

"It is the water," said Luis Cervallos.

"Yes, it is the water," said John Harned. "Would it not be safer to hamstring the bull before he comes on?"

Maria Valenzuela was made angry by this sneer in John Harned's words. But Luis Cervallos smiled so that only I could see him, and then it broke upon my mind surely the game he was playing. He and I were to be banderilleros. The big American bull was there in the box

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with us. We were to stick the darts in him till he became angry, and then there might be no marriage with Maria Valenzuela. It was a good sport. And the spirit of bull-fighters was in our blood.

The bull in the ring was now angry and excited. The capadors had great game with him. He was very quick, and sometimes he turned with such sharpness that his hind legs lost their footing and he plowed the sand with his quarter. But he charged always the flung capes and committed no harm.

"He has no chance," said John Harned. "He is fighting wind."

"He thinks the cape is his enemy," explained Maria Valenzuela. "See how cleverly the capador deceives him."

"It is his nature to be deceived," said John Harned. "Wherefore he is doomed to fight wind. The toreadors know it, the audience knows it, you know it, I know it—we all know from the first that he will fight wind. He only does not know it. It is his stupid beast-nature. He has no chance."

"It is very simple," said Luis Cervallos. "The bull shuts his eyes when he charges. Therefore—"

"The man steps out of the way and the bull rushes by," John Harned interrupted.

"Yes," said Luis Cervallos, "that is it. The bull shuts his eyes, and the man knows it."

"But cows do not shut their eyes," said John Harned. "I know a cow at home that is a Jersey and gives milk, that would whip the whole gang of them."

"But the toreadors do not fight cows," said I.

"They are afraid to fight cows," said John Harned.

"Yes," said Luis Cervallos, "they are afraid to fight cows. There would be no sport in killing toreadors."

"There would be some sport," said John Harned, "if a toreador were killed once in a while. When I become an old man, and mayhap a cripple, and should I need to make a living and be unable to do hard work, then would I become a bull-fighter. It is a light vocation for elderly gentlemen and pensioners."

"But see!" said Maria Valenzuela, as the bull charged bravely and the capador eluded it with a fling of his cape. "It requires skill so to avoid the beast."

"True," said John Harned. "But believe me, it requires a thousand times more skill to avoid the many and quick punches of a prize-fighter who keeps his eyes open and strikes with intelligence. Furthermore, this bull does not want to fight. Behold, he runs away."

It was not a good bull, for again it ran around the ring, seeking to find a way out.

"Yet these bulls are sometimes the most dangerous," said Luis Cervallos. "It can never be known what they will do next. They are

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wise. They are half cow. The bull-fighters never like them.—See! He has turned!"

Once again, baffled and made angry by the walls of the ring that would not let him out, the bull was attacking his enemies valiantly.

"His tongue is hanging out," said John Harned. "First, they fill him with water. Then they tire him out, one man and then another, persuading him to exhaust himself by fighting wind. While some tire him, others rest. But the bull they never let rest. Afterward, when he is quite tired and no longer quick, the matador sticks the sword into him."

The time had now come for the banderillos. Three times one of the fighters endeavored to place the darts, and three times did he fail. He but stung the bull and maddened it. The banderillos must go in, you know, two at a time, into the shoulders, on each side the backbone and close to it. If but one be placed, it is a failure.

The crowd hissed and called for Ordonez. And then Ordonez did a great thing. Four times he stood forth, and four times, at the first attempt, he stuck in the banderillos, so that eight of them, well placed, stood out of the back of the bull at one time. The crowd went mad, and a rain of hats and money fell upon the sand of the ring.

And just then the bull charged unexpectedly one of the capadors. The man slipped and lost his head. The bull caught him—fortunately, between his wide horns. And while the audience watched, breathless and silent, John Harned stood up and yelled with gladness. Alone, in that hush of all of us, John Harned yelled. And he yelled for the bull.

As you see yourself, John Harned wanted the man killed. His was a brutal heart. This bad conduct made those angry that sat in the box of General Salazar, and they cried out against John Harned. And Urcisino Castillo told him to his face that he was a dog of a Gringo and other things. Only it was in Spanish, and John Harned did not understand. He stood and yelled, perhaps for the time of ten seconds, when the bull was enticed into charging the other capadors and the man arose unhurt.

"The bull has no chance," John Harned said with sadness as he sat down. "The man was uninjured. They fooled the bull away from him." Then he turned to Maria Valenzuela and said, "I beg your pardon. I was excited."

She smiled and in reproof tapped his arm with her fan.

"It is your first bull-fight," she said. "After you have seen more you will not cry for the death of the man. You Americans, you see, are more brutal than we. It is because of your prize-fighting. We come only to see the bull killed."

"But I would the bull had some chance," he answered. "Doubtless,

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in time, I shall cease to be annoyed by the men who take advantage of the bull."

The bugles blew for the death. Ordonez stood forth with the sword and the scarlet cloth. But the bull had changed again, and did not want to fight. Ordonez stamped his foot in the sand, and cried out, and waved the scarlet cloth. Then the bull charged, but without heart. There was no weight to the charge. It was a poor thrust. The sword struck a bone and bent.

Ordonez took a fresh sword. The bull, again stung to fight, charged once more. Five times Ordonez essayed the thrust, and each time the sword went but part way in or struck bone. The sixth time, the sword went in to the hilt. But it was a bad thrust. The sword missed the heart and stuck out half a yard through the ribs on the opposite side.

The audience hissed the matador. I glanced at John Harned. He sat silent, without movement; but I could see his teeth were set, and his hands were clenched tight on the railing of the box.

All fight was now out of the bull, and though it was no vital thrust, he trotted lamely. He ran away from the matador and the capadors, and circled the edge of the ring, looking up at the many faces.

"He is saying, 'For God's sake, let me out of this—I don't want to fight,'" said John Harned.

That was all. He said no more, but sat and watched, though sometimes he looked sideways at Maria Valenzuela to see how she took it. She was angry with the matador. He was awkward, and she had desired a clever exhibition.

The bull was now very tired, and weak from loss of blood, though far from dying. He walked slowly around the wall of the ring, seeking a way out. He would not charge. He had had enough. But he must be killed.

There is a place, in the neck of a bull behind the horns, where the cord of the spine is unprotected and where a short stab will immediately kill. Ordonez stepped in front of the bull and lowered his scarlet cloth to the ground. The bull would not charge. He stood still and smelled the cloth, lowering his head to do so.

Ordonez stabbed between the horns at the spot in the neck. The bull jerked his head up. The stab had missed. Then the bull watched the sword. When Ordonez moved the cloth on the ground, the bull forgot the sword and lowered his head to smell the cloth.

Again Ordonez stabbed, and again he failed. He tried many times. It was stupid. And John Harned said nothing. At last a stab went home, and the bull fell to the sand, dead immediately, and the mules were made fast and he was dragged out.

"The Gringos say it is a cruel sport—no?" said Luis Cervallos.

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"That it is not humane. That it is bad for the bull. No?"

"No," said John Harned. "The bull does not count for much. It is bad for those that look on. It is degrading to those that look on. It teaches them to delight in animal suffering. It is cowardly for five men to fight one stupid bull. Therefore those that look on learn to be cowards. The bull dies, but those that look on live and the lesson is learned. The bravery of men is not nourished by scenes of cowardice."

Maria Valenzuela said nothing. Neither did she look at him. But she heard every word and her cheeks were white with anger. She looked out across the ring and fanned herself, but I saw that her hand trembled. Nor did John Harned look at her. He went on as though she were not there. He, too, was angry, coldly angry.

"It is the cowardly sport of a cowardly people," he said.

"Ah," said Luis Cervallos softly, "you think you understand us."

"I understand now the Spanish Inquisition," said John Harned. "It must have been more delightful than bull-fighting."

Luis Cervallos smiled but said nothing. He glanced at Maria Valenzuela, and knew that the bull-fight in the box was won. Never would she have further to do with the Gringo who spoke such words.

But neither Luis Cervallos nor I was prepared for the outcome of the day. How were we to know that John Harned, who was so coldly angry, should go suddenly mad?

But mad he did go, as you shall see. The bull did not count for much—he said so himself. Then why should the horse count for so much? That I cannot understand. The mind of John Harned lacked logic. That is the only explanation.

"It is not usual to have horses in the bull ring at Quito," said Luis Cervallos, looking up from the program. "In Spain they always have them. But today, by special permission, we shall have them. When the next bull comes on there will be horses and picadors—you know, the men who carry lances and ride the horses."

"The bull is doomed from the first," said John Harned. "Are the horses then likewise doomed?"

"They are blindfolded so that they may not see the bull," said Luis Cervallos. "I have seen many horses killed. It is a brave sight."

"I have seen the bull slaughtered," said John Harned. "I will now see the horse slaughtered, so that I may understand more fully the fine points of this noble sport."

"They are old horses," said Luis Cervallos, "that are not good for anything else."

"I see," said John Harned.

The third bull came on, and soon against it were both capadors and picadors. One picador took his stand directly below us. I agree, it was a thin and aged horse he rode,

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a bag of bones covered with mangy hide.

"It is a marvel that the poor brute can hold up the weight of the rider," said John Harned. "And now that the horse fights the bull, what weapons has it?"

"The horse does not fight the bull," said Luis Cervallos.

"Oh," said John Harned, "then is the horse there to be gored? That must be why it is blindfolded, so that it shall not see the bull coming to gore it."

"Not quite so," said I. "The lance of the picador is to keep the bull from goring the horse."

"Then are horses rarely gored?" asked John Harned.

"No," said Luis Cervallos. "I have seen, at Seville, eighteen horses killed in one day, and the people clamored for more horses."

"Were they blindfolded like this horse?" asked John Harned.

"Yes," said Luis Cervallos.

After that we talked no more, but watched the fight. And John Harned was going mad all the time, and we did not know.

The bull refused to charge the horse. And the horse stood still, and because it could not see, it did not know that the capadors were trying to make the bull charge upon it. The capadors teased the bull with their capes, and when it charged them they ran toward the horse and into their shelters. At last the bull was well angry, and it saw the horse before it.

"The horse does not know, the horse does not know," John Harned whispered to himself, unaware that he voiced his thought aloud.

The bull charged, and of course the horse knew nothing till the picador failed and the horse found himself impaled on the bull's horns from beneath. The bull was magnificently strong. The sight of its strength was splendid to see. It lifted the horse clear into the air; and as the horse fell to its side on the ground the picador landed on his feet and escaped, while the capadors lured the bull away.

It was the scream of the horse that did it, that made John Harned completely mad; for he, too, like the horse, started to rise to his feet. I heard him curse low and deep. He never took his eyes from the horse, which, still screaming, strove to run, but fell down instead and rolled on its back so that all its four legs were kicking in the air.

Then the bull charged it and gored it again and again until the horse was dead.

John Harned was now on his feet. His eyes were no longer cold like steel. They were blue flames. He looked at Maria Valenzuela, and she looked at him, and in his face was a great loathing. The moment of his madness was upon him. Everybody was looking, now that the horse was dead; and John Harned was a large man and easy to be seen.

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"Sit down," said Luis Cervallos, "or you will make a fool of yourself."

John Harned replied nothing. He struck out with his fist. He smote Luis Cervallos in the face so that he fell like a dead man across the chairs and did not rise again. He saw nothing of what followed. But I saw much.

Urcisino Castillo, leaning forward from the next box, with his cane struck John Harned full across the face. And John Harned smote him with his fist so that in falling he overthrew General Salazar. John Harned was now in what you call berserker rage—no? The beast primitive in him was loose and roaring—the beast primitive of the holes and caves of the long ago.

"You came for a bull-fight," I heard him say, "and by God I'll show you a man-fight!"

It was a fight. The soldiers guarding the Presidente's box leaped across, but from one of them he took a rifle and beat them on their heads with it. From the other box Colonel Jacinto Fierro was shooting at him with a revolver. The first shot killed a soldier. This I know for a fact. I saw it.

But the second shot struck John Harned in the side. Whereupon he swore, and with a lunge drove the bayonet of his rifle into Colonel Jacinto Fierro's body. It was horrible to behold. The Americans and the English are a brutal race. They sneer at our bull-fighting, yet do they delight in the shedding of blood. More men were killed that day because of John Harned than were ever killed in all the history of the bull ring of Quito, yes, and of Guayaquil and all Ecuador.

It was the scream of the horse that did it. Yet why did not John Harned go mad when the bull was killed? A beast is a beast, be it bull or horse. John Harned was mad. There is no other explanation. He was blood-mad, a beast himself. I leave it to your judgment. Which is worse—the goring of the horse by the bull, or the goring of Colonel Jacinto Fierro by the bayonet in the hands of John Harned?

And John Harned gored others with the bayonet. He was full of devils. He fought with many bullets in him, and he was hard to kill. And Maria Valenzuela was a brave woman. Unlike the other women, she did not cry out nor faint. She sat still in her box, gazing out across the bull ring. Her face was white and she fanned herself, but she never looked around.

From all sides came the soldiers and officers and the common people bravely to subdue the mad Gringo. It is true—the cry went up from the crowd to kill all the Gringos. It is an old cry in Latin-American countries, what of the dislike for the Gringos and their uncouth ways.

It is true, the cry went up. But the brave Ecuadorianos killed only John Harned, and first he killed

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seven of them. Besides, there were many hurt. I have seen many bull-fights, but never have I seen anything so abominable as the scene in the boxes when the fight was over.

It was like a field of battle. The dead lay around everywhere, while the wounded sobbed and groaned and some of them died. One man, whom John Harned had thrust through the belly with the bayonet clutched at himself with both his hands and screamed. I tell you for a fact it was more terrible than the screaming of a thousand horses.

No, Maria Valenzuela did not marry Luis Cervallos. I am sorry for her. He was my friend, and much of my money was invested in his ventures. It was five weeks before the surgeons took the bandages from his face. And there is a scar there to this day, on the cheek, under the eye. Yet John Harned struck him but once and struck him only with his naked fist.

Maria Valenzuela is in Austria now. It is said she is to marry an Archduke or some high nobleman. I do not know. I think she liked John Harned before he followed her to Quito to see the bull-fight.

But why the horse? That is what I desire to know. Why should he watch the bull and say that it did not count, and then go immediately and most horribly mad because a horse screamed? There is no understanding the Gringos. They are barbarians.

NEXT MONTH . . .

HUGH PENTECOST's	*The Bottomless Pit*
RUFUS KING's	*The Bluebird Persuaders*
ROBERT ARTHUR's	*Larceny and Old Lace*
JOHN & WARD HAWKINS'	*Little Boy Missing*
FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE's	*Cat of Dreams*

and Part Two of Richard Harding Davis's IN THE FOG

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CARTER DICKSON**
(John Dickson Carr)

TITLE: ***The Silver Curtain***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Colonel March, D.Q.C.

LOCALE: La Bandelette, France

TIME: About 20 years ago

COMMENTS: *The young Englishman had staked everything at baccarat—and lost. Then a fat, sleek stranger started him off on a modern Arabian Nights adventure . . .*

THE CROUPIER'S WRIST MOVED with such fluent ease as to seem boneless. Over the green baize its snaky activity never hesitated, never wavered, never was still. His rake, like an enormous butter-pat, attracted the cards, flicked them up, juggled them, and slid them in a steady stream through the slot of the table.

No voice was raised in the Casino at La Bandelette. There was much casualness; hardly any laughter. The tall red curtains and the padded red floors closed in a sort of idle concentration at a dozen tables. And out of it, at Table Number Six, the croupier's monotone droned on.

"Six mille. Banco? Six mille. Banco? Banco?"

"Banco," said the young Englishman across the table. The cards, white and gray, slipped smoothly from the shoe. And the young man lost again.

The croupier hadn't time to notice much. The people round him, moving in hundreds through the season, were hardly human beings at all. There was a calculating machine inside his head; he heard its clicks, he watched the run of its numbers, and it was all he had time for. Yet so acutely were his senses developed that he could tell almost within a hundred francs how much

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money the players at his table still retained. The young man opposite was nearly broke.

(Best to be careful. This perhaps means trouble.)

Casually the croupier glanced round his table. There were five players, all English, as was to be expected. There was the fair-haired girl with the elderly man, obviously her father, who had a bald head and looked ill; he breathed behind his hand. There was the very heavy, military-looking man whom someone had addressed as Colonel March. There was the fat, sleek, swarthy young man with the twisty eyebrows (dubious English?), whose complacency had grown with his run of luck and whose wallet stuffed with *mille* notes lay at his elbow. Finally, there was the young man who lost so much.

The young man got up from his chair.

He had no poker face. The atmosphere about him was so desperately embarrassed that the fair-haired girl spoke.

"Leaving, Mr. Winton" she asked.

"Er—yes," said Mr. Winton. He seemed grateful for that little help thrown into his disquiet. He seized at it; he smiled back at her. "No luck yet. Time to get a drink and offer up prayers for the next session."

(Look here, thought Jerry Winton, why stand here explaining? It's not serious. You'll get out of it, even if it does mean a nasty bit of trouble. They all know you're broke. Stop standing here laughing like a gawk, and get away from the table. He looked into the eyes of the fair-haired girl, and wished he hadn't been such an ass.)

"Get a drink," he repeated.

He strode away from the table with (imagined) laughter following him. The sleek young man had lifted a moonface and merely looked at him in a way that roused Jerry Winton's wrath.

(Curse La Bandelette and baccarat and everything else.)

"There," reflected the croupier, "is a young man who will have trouble with his hotel. *Banco? Six mille. Banco?"*

In the bar, which adjoined the casino rooms, Jerry Winton crawled up on one of the high stools, called for an Armagnac, and pushed his last hundred-franc note across the counter. His head was full of a row of figures written in the spidery style of France. His hotel bill for a week would come to—what? Four, five, six thousand francs?* It would be presented tomorrow, and all he had was his return ticket to London by plane.

In the big mirror behind the bar a new image emerged from the crowd. It was that of the fat, sleek, oily-faced young man who had cleaned up such a packet at the table, and who was even now finger-

*All this happened when the franc was worth considerably more than it is today.

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ing his wallet lovingly before he put it away. He climbed up on a stool beside Jerry. He called for mineral water: how shrewd and finicky-crafty these expert gamblers were! He relighted the stump of a cigar in a corner of his mouth.

Then he spoke. "Broke?" he inquired offhandedly.

Jerry Winton glared at his reflection in the mirror.

"I don't see," Jerry said, with a slow and murderous choosing of words, "that that's anybody's business except mine."

"Oh, that's all right," said the stranger, in the same unpleasantly offhanded tone. He took several puffs at his cigar; he drank a little mineral water. He added, "I expect it's pretty serious, though? Eh?"

"If the matter," said Jerry, turning round, "is of so much interest to you—no, it's not serious. I have plenty of money back home. The trouble is that this is Friday night, and I can't get in touch with the bank until Monday." Though this was quite true, he saw the other's fishy expression grow broader. "It's a damned nuisance, because they don't know me at the hotel. But a nuisance is all it is. If you think I'm liable to go out in the garden and shoot myself, stop thinking it."

The other smiled sadly and fishily, and shook his head. "You don't say? I can't believe that now can I?"

"I don't care what you believe."

"You should care," said his companion, unruffled. As Jerry slid down from the stool, he reached out and tapped Jerry on the arm. "Don't be in such a rush. You say you're a boy Croesus. All right, you're a boy Croesus. *I* won't argue with you. But tell me, how's your nerve?"

"My what?"

"Your nerve. Your courage," explained his companion, with something like a sneer.

Jerry Winton looked back at the bland, self-assured face poised above the mineral water. His companion's feet were entangled with the legs of the bar stool; his short upper lip was lifted with acute self-confidence; and a blank eye jeered down.

"I thought I'd ask," he pursued. "My name is Davos, Ferdie Davos. Everybody knows me." He swept his hand toward the crowd. "How'd you like to make ten thousand francs?"

"I'd like it a whole lot. But I don't know whether I'd like to make it out of any business of yours."

Davos was unruffled. "It's no good trying to be on your dignity with me. It don't impress me and it won't help you. I still ask, how would you like to make ten thousand francs? That would more than cover what you owe or are likely to owe, wouldn't it? I thought so. Do you or don't you want to make ten thousand francs?"

"Yes, I do," Jerry snarled back.

"All right. See a doctor."

"*What?*"

"See a doctor," Davos repeated coolly. "A nerve tonic is what you

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want—pills. No, I'm not wisecracking." He looked at the clock, whose hands stood at five minutes to eleven. "Go to this address—listen carefully while I tell you—and there'll be ten thousand in it for you. Go to this address in about an hour. No sooner, no later. Do your job properly, and there may be even more than ten thousand in it for you. Number Two, Square St. Jean, Avenue des Phares, in about an hour. We'll see how your nerve is then."

La Bandelette, "the fillet," that strip of silver beach along the channel, is full of flat-roofed and queerly painted houses which give it the look of a town in a Walt Disney film. But the town itself is of secondary consideration. The English colony, which is of a frantic fashionableness, lies among great trees behind. Close to the Casino de la Forêt are three great hotels, gay with awning and piling sham Gothic turrets into the sky. The air is aromatic; open carriages clop and jingle along broad avenues; and the art of extracting money from guests has become so perfected that they find their hands going to their pockets even in sleep.

This sleep is taken by day. By night, when La Bandelette is sealed up except for the Casino, the beam of the great island lighthouse sweeps the streets. It dazzles and then dies, once every twenty seconds. And, as Jerry Winton strode under the trees toward the Avenue of the Lighthouses, its beam was beginning to be blurred by rain.

Square St. Jean, Avenue des Phares. Where? And why?

If Davos had approached him in any other way, Jerry admitted to himself, he would have paid no attention to it. But he was annoyed and curious. Besides, unless there were a trick in it, he could use ten thousand francs. There was probably a trick in it. But who cared?

It was the rain that made him hesitate. He heard it patter in the trees, and deepen to a heavy rustling, as he saw the signboard pointing to the Avenue des Phares. He was without hat or coat. But by this time he meant to see the thing through.

Ahead of him was a street of fashionable villas, lighted by mere sparks of gas. An infernally dark street. Something queer, and more than queer, about this. Total strangers didn't ask you how strong your nerves were, and then offer you ten thousand francs on top of it, for any purpose that would pass the customs. Which was all the more reson why . . .

Then he saw Davos.

Davos did not see him. Davos was ahead of him, walking fast and with little short steps along the dim street. The white beam of the lighthouse shone out overhead, turning the rain to silver; and Jerry could see the gleam of his polished black hair and the light tan topcoat he was

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now wearing. Pulling up the collar of his dinner jacket, Jerry followed.

A few yards farther on Davos slackened his pace. He peered round and up. On his left was the entrance to a courtyard, evidently the Square St. Jean. But to call it a "square" was noble overstatement; it was only a cul-de-sac some 20 feet wide by 40 feet deep.

Two of its three sides were merely tall, blank brick walls. The third side, on the right, was formed of a tall flat house all of whose windows were closely shuttered. But there was at least a sign of life about the house. Over its door burned a dim white globe, showing that there was a doctor's brass name-plate beside the door. A sedate house with blue-painted shutters in the bare cul-de-sac—and Davos was making for it.

All this Jerry saw at a glance. Then he moved back from the cul-de-sac. The rain was sluicing down on him, blurring the dim white globe with shadow and gleam. Davos had almost reached the doctor's door. He had paused, as though to consider or look at something; and then . . .

Jerry Winton later swore that he had taken his eyes off Davos only for a second. This was true. Jerry, in fact, had glanced back along the Avenue des Phares behind him and was heartened to see the figure of a policeman some distance away. What made him look quickly back again was a noise from the cul-de-sac, a noise that was something between a cough and a scream, bubbling up horribly under the rain; and afterward the thud of a body on asphalt.

One moment Davos had been on his feet. The next moment he was lying on his side on the pavement, and kicking.

Overheard the beam of the lighthouse wheeled again. Jerry, reaching Davos in a run of a half a dozen long strides, saw the whole scene picked out by that momentary light. Davos's fingers still clutched, or tried to clutch, the well-filled wallet Jerry had last seen at the Casino. His tan topcoat was now dark with rain. His heels scraped on the pavement, for he had been stabbed through the back of the neck with a heavy knife whose polished-metal handle projected four inches. Then the wallet slipped out of his fingers, and splashed into a puddle, for the man died.

Jerry Winton looked, and did not believe his own eyes. Mechanically he reached down and picked up the wallet out of the puddle, shaking it. He backed away as he heard running footfalls pound into the cul-de-sac, and he saw the flying waterproof of a policeman.

"Halt there!" the law shouted in French. The policeman, a dim shape under the waterproof, pulled up short and stared. After seeing what was on the pavement, he made a noise like a man hit in the stomach.

Jerry pulled his wits together and

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conned over his French for the proper phrases. "His—this wallet," said Jerry, extending it.

"So I see."

"He is dead."

"That would appear obvious," agreed the other, with a kind of snort. "Well! Give it to me. Quick, quick! His wallet."

The policeman extended his hand, snapping the fingers. He added, "No stupidities, please! I am prepared for you."

"But I didn't kill him."

"That remains to be seen."

"Man, you don't think—?" He broke off. The trouble was that it had happened too rapidly. Jerry's feeling was that of one who meets a super-salesman and under whirlwind tactics is persuaded to buy some huge and useless article before he realizes what the talk is all about.

For here was a minor miracle. He had seen the man Davos stabbed under his eyes. Davos had been stabbed by a straight blow from behind, the heavy knife entering in a straight line sloping a little upward, as though the blow had been struck from the direction of the pavement. Yet at the same time Davos had been alone in a cul-de-sac as bare as an empty biscuit box.

"It is not my business to think," said the policeman curtly. "I make my notes and I report to my commissaire. Now!" He withdrew into the shelter of the dimlit doorway, his wary eye fixed on Jerry, and whipped out his notebook. "Let us have no nonsense. You killed this man and attempted to rob him. I saw you."

"No!"

"You were alone with him in this court. I saw as much myself."

"Yes, that is true."

"Good; he admits it! You saw no one else in the court?"

"No."

"*Justement.* Could any assassin have approached without being seen?"

Jerry, even as he saw the bleak eye grow bleaker, had to admit that this was impossible. On two sides were blank brick walls; on the third side was a house whose door or windows, he could swear, had not opened a crack. In the second's space of time while he looked away, no murderer could have approached, stabbed Davos, and got back to cover again. There was no cover. This was so apparent that Jerry could not even think of a reasonable lie. He merely stuttered.

"I do not now what happened," he insisted. "One minute he was there and then he fell. I saw nobody." Then a light opened in his mind. "Wait! That knife there—it must have been thrown at him."

Rich and sardonic humor stared at him from the doorway. "Thrown, you say? Thrown from where?"

"I don't know," admitted Jerry.

The light went out. Again he stared at blank brick walls, and at the house from whose sealed front no knife could have been thrown.

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"Consider," pursued his companion, in an agony of logic, "the position of the knife. This gentleman was walking with his back to you?"

"Yes."

"Good; we progress." He pointed. "The knife enters the back of his neck in a straight line. It enters from the direction where you were standing. Could it have been thrown past you from the entrance to the court?"

"No. Impossible."

"No. That is evident," blared his companion. "I cannot listen to any more stupidities. I indulge you because you are English and we have orders to indulge the English. But this goes beyond reason! You will go with me to the Hotel de Ville. Look at the note-case in his hand. Does he offer it to you and say, 'Monsieur, honor me by accepting my note-case'?"

"No. He had it in his own hand."

"He had it in his own hand, say you. Why?"

"I don't know."

Jerry broke off, both because the story of his losses at the Casino must now come out with deadly significance, and because they heard the rattle of a door being unlocked. The door of the doctor's house opened; and out stepped the fair-haired girl whom Jerry had last seen at the Casino.

Beside the door the brass nameplate read *Dr. Edouard Hébert,* with consulting hours inscribed underneath, and an aggressive, *"Speaks English."* Behind the girl, craning his neck, stood a bristly, middle-aged man of immense dignity. His truculent eyeglasses had a broad black ribbon which seemed to form a kind of electrical circuit with the ends of his brushed-up mustache.

But Jerry Winton was not looking at Dr. Hébert. He was looking at the girl. In addition to a light fur coat, she now wore a cream-colored scraf drawn over her hair; she had in one hand a tiny box, wrapped in white paper. Her smooth, worried face, her long, pale-blue eyes, seemed to reflect the expression of the dead man staring back at her from the pavement. She jerked back, bumping into the policeman. She put her hand on Dr. Hébert's arm. With her other hand she pointed sharply to Davos.

"That's the man!" she cried.

Monsieur Goron, prefect of Police, was a comfortable man, a round, cat-like amiable sort of man, famous for his manners. Crime, rare in La Bandelette, distressed him. But he was also an able man. At one o'clock in the morning he sat in his office at the Town Hall examing his fingernails and creaking back and forth in a squeaky swivel chair whose noise had begun to get on Jerry Winton's nerves.

The girl, who for the tenth time had given her name as Eleanor Hood, was insistent, "Monsieur Goron!"

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"Mademoiselle?" said the prefect politely, and seemed to wake out of a dream.

Eleanor Hood turned round and gave Jerry Winton a despairing look.

"I only wish to know," she urged, in excellent French, "why we are here, Dr. Hébert and I. And Mr. Winton too, if it comes to that." This time the look she gave Jerry was one of smiling companionship—a human sort of look, which warmed that miscreant. "But as for us—why? It is not as though we were witnesses. I have told you why I was at Dr. Hébert's house."

"Mademoiselle's father," murmured Monsieur Goron.

"Yes. He is ill. Dr. Hébert has been treating him for several days, and he had another attack at the Casino tonight. Mr. Winton will confirm that."

Jerry nodded. The old boy at the table, he reflected, had certainly looked ill.

"I took my father back to our hotel, the Brittany, at half-past eleven," the girl went on, speaking with great intensity. "I tried to communicate with Dr. Hébert by telephone. I could not reach him. So I went to his house; it is only a short distance from the hotel. On the way I kept seeing that man—the man you call Davos. I thought he was following me. He seemed to be looking at me from behind every tree. That is why I said, 'That's the man,' when I saw him lying on the pavement with his eyes open. His eyes did not even blink when the rain struck them. It was a horrible sight. I was upset. Do you blame me?"

Monsieur Goron made a sympathetic noise.

"I reached Dr. Hébert's house at perhaps twenty minutes to twelve. Dr. Hébert had retired, but he consented to go with me. I waited while he dressed. We went out, and on the doorstep we found—what you know. Please believe that is all I know about it."

She had a singularly expressive voice and personality. She was either all anxiety or all persuasiveness, fashioning the clipped syllables. When she turned her wrist, you saw Davos lying in the rain and the searchlight wheeling overhead.

Then she added abruptly in English, looking at Jerry, "He was a nasty little beast; but I don't for a moment believe you killed him."

"Thanks. But why?"

"I don't know," said Eleanor simply. "You just couldn't have."

"Now there is logic!" cried Monsieur Goron, giving his desk an admiring whack.

Monsieur Goron's swivel chair creaked with pleasure. There were many lights in his office, which smelt of creosote. On the desk in front of him lay Davos's sodden wallet and (curiously) the tiny round box, wrapped in a spill of paper, which Eleanor Hood had been carrying. Monsieur Goron never

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spoke to Jerry, never looked at him; ignored him as completely and blandly as though he were not there.

"But," he continued, growing very sober again, "you will forgive me, mademoiselle, if I pursue this matter further. You say that Dr. Hébert has been treating your father?"

"Yes."

Monsieur Goron pointed to the small box on the table. "With pills, perhaps?"

"Ah, my God!" said Hébert, and slapped his forehead tragically.

For several minutes Jerry had been afraid that the good doctor would have an apoplectic stroke. Dr. Hébert had indicated his distinguished position in the community. He had pointed out that physicians do not go out in the middle of the night on errands of mercy, and then get dragged off to police stations; it is bad for business. His truculent eyeglasses and mustache bristling, he left off his stiff pacing of the room only to go and look the prefect in the eye.

"I *will* speak," he said coldly, from deep in his throat.

"As monsieur pleases."

"Well, it is as this lady says! Why are we here? Why? We are not witnesses." He broke off, and slapped at the shoulders of his coat as though to rid himself of insects. "This young man here tells us a story which may or may not be true. If it is true, I do not see why the man Davos should have given him *my* address. I do not see why Davos should have been knifed on my doorstep. I did not know the man Davos, except as a patient of mine."

"Ah!" said the prefect. "You gave him pills, perhaps?"

Dr. Hébert sat down. "Are you mad on the subject of pills?" he inquired, with restraint. "Because this young man"—again he looked with disfavor at Jerry—"tells you that Davos made some drunken mention of 'pills' at the Casino tonight, is that why you pursue the subject?"

"It is possible."

"It is ridiculous," said Dr. Hébert. "Do you even question my pills on the desk there? They are for Miss Hood's father. They are ordinary tablets, with digitalin for the heart. Do you think they contain poison? If so, why not test them?"

"It is an idea," conceded Monsieur Goron.

He picked up the box and removed the paper. The box contained half a dozen sugar-coated pellets. With great seriousness Monsieur Goron put one of the tablets into his mouth, tasted it, bit it, and finally appeared to swallow it.

"No poison?" asked the doctor.

"No poison," agreed Monsieur Goron. The telephone on his desk rang. He picked it up, listened for a moment with a dreamy smile, and replaced it. "Now this is really excellent!" he beamed, rubbing his hands. "My good friend Colonel March, of the English police, has

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been making investigations. He was sent here when a certain form of activity in La Bandelette became intolerable both to the French and English authorities. You perhaps noticed him at the Casino tonight, all of you?"

"I remember," said Jerry suddenly. "Very large bloke, quiet as sin."

"An apt description," said the prefect.

"But—" began Dr. Hébert.

"I said 'all of you,' Dr. Hébert," repeated the prefect. "One small question is permitted? I thank you. When mademoiselle telephoned to your house at eleven thirty tonight, you were not there. You were at the Casino, perhaps?"

Dr. Hébert stared at him. "It is possible. But—"

"You saw Monsieur Davos there, perhaps?"

"It is possible." Still Dr. Hébert stared at him with hideous perplexity. "But, Monsieur Goron, will you have the goodness to explain this? You surely do not suspect either mademoiselle or myself of having any concern with this business? You do not think that either mademoiselle or I left the house at the time of the murder?"

"I am certain you did not."

"You do not think either mademoiselle or myself went near a door or a window to get at this accursed Davos?"

"I am certain you did not," beamed the prefect.

"Well, then?"

"But there, you see," argued Monsieur Goron, lifting one finger for emphasis, "we encounter a difficulty. We are among thorns. For this would mean that Monsieur Winton must have committed the murder. And that," he added, looking at Jerry, "is absurd. We never for a moment believed that Monsieur Winton had anything to do with this; and my friend Colonel March will tell you why."

Jerry sat back and studied the face of the prefect, wondering if he had heard aright. He felt like an emotional punching bag. But with great gravity he returned the prefect's nod as a sergeant de ville opened the door of the office.

"We will spik English," announced Monsieur Goron, bouncing up. "This is my friend Colonel March."

"Evening," said the colonel. His large, speckled face was as bland as Monsieur Goron's; his fists were on his hips. He looked first at Eleanor, then at Jerry, then at Dr. Hébert. "Sorry you were put to this inconvenience, Miss Hood. But I've seen your father, and it will be all right. As for you, Mr. Winton, I hope they have put you out of your misery?"

"Misery?"

"Told you you're not headed for Devil's Island, or anything of the sort? We had three very good reasons for believing you had nothing to do with this. Here is the first reason."

Reaching into the pocket of his

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dinner jacket, he produced an article which he held out to them. It was a black leather wallet, exactly like the one already on Monsieur Goron's desk. But whereas the first was stuffed with *mille* notes, this one had only a few hundred francs in it.

"We found this second wallet in Davos's pocket," said Colonel March.

He seemed to wait for a comment, but none came.

"Well, what about it?" Jerry demanded, after a pause.

"Oh, come! Two wallets! Why was Davos carrying two wallets? Why should any man carry two wallets? That is my first reason. Here is my second."

From the inside pocket of his coat, with the air of a conjurer, he drew out the knife with which Davos had been stabbed.

A suggestive sight. Now cleansed of blood, it was a long, thin, heavy blade with a light metal handle and cross-piece. As Colonel March turned it around, glittering in the light, Jerry Winton felt that its glitter struck a chord of familiarity in his mind: that a scene from the past had almost come back to him: that, for a swift and tantalizing second, he had almost grasped the meaning of the whole problem.

"And now we come to my third reason," said Colonel March. "The third reason is Ferdie Davos. Ferdie was a hotel thief. A great deal too clever for us poor policemen. Eh, Goron? ? Though I always told him he was a bad judge of men. At the height of the summer season, at hotels like the Brittany and the Donjon, he had rich pickings. He specialized in necklaces, particularly in pearl necklaces. Kindly note that."

A growing look of comprehension had come into Eleanor Hood's face. She opened her mouth to speak, and then checked herself.

"His problem," pursued Colonel March, "was how to smuggle the stolen stuff over to England, where he had a market for it. He couldn't carry it himself. In a little place like La Bandelette, Goron would have had him turned inside out if he had as much as taken a step toward Boulogne. So he had to have accomplices. I mean accomplices picked from among the hordes of unattached young men who come here every season. Find some young fool who's just dropped more than he can afford at the tables; and he may grab at the chance to earn a few thousand francs by a little harmless customs bilking. You follow me, Mr. Winton?"

"You mean that I was chosen—?"

"Yes."

"But, good lord, how? I couldn't smuggle a pearl necklace through the customs if my life depended on it."

"You could if you needed a tonic," Colonel March pointed out. "Davos told you so. The necklace would first be taken apart. Each

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pearl would be given a thick sugar coating, forming a neat medicinal pill. They would then be poured into a neat bottle or box under the prescription of a well-known doctor. At the height of the tourist rush, the customs can't curry-comb everybody. They would be looking for a pearl smuggler: not for an obviously respectable young tourist with stomach trouble."

Eleanor Hood, with sudden realization in her face, looked at the box of pills on Monsieur Goron's desk.

"So *that* is why you tasted my pills!" she said to the prefect of police, who made deprecating noises. "And kept me here for so long. And—"

"Mademoiselle, I assure you!" said Monsieur Goron. "We were sure there was nothing wrong with those pills!" He somewhat spoiled the gallant effect of this by adding, "There are not enough of them, for one thing. But, since you received them from Dr. Hébert after office hours, you had to be investigated. The trick is neat, *hein?* I fear the firm of Hébert and Davos have been working it for some time."

They all turned to look at Dr. Hébert.

He was sitting bolt upright, his chin drawn into his collar as though he were going to sing. On his face was a look of what can only be called frightened skepticism. Even his mouth was half open with this effect, or with unuttered sounds of ridicule.

"We were also obliged to delay you all," pursued Monsieur Goron, "until my men found Madame Fley's pearls, which were stolen a week ago, hidden in Dr. Hébert's surgery. I repeat, it was a neat trick. We might never have seen it if Davos had not incautiously hinted at it to Monsieur Winton. But then Davos was getting a bit above himself." He added, "That, Colonel March thinks, is why Dr. Hébert decided to kill him."

Still Dr. Hébert said nothing.

It was, in fact, Jerry Winton who spoke. "Sir, I don't hold any brief for this fellow. But now could he have killed Davos? He couldn't have!"

"You are forgetting," said Colonel March, as cheerfully as though the emotional temperature of the room had not gone up several degrees, "you are forgetting the two wallets. Why was Davos carrying two wallets?"

"Well?"

"He wasn't," said Colonel March, with his eye on Hébert. "Our good doctor here was, of course, the brains of the partnership. He supplied the resources for Ferdie's noble front. When Ferdie played baccarat at the Casino, he was playing with Dr. Hébert's money. And, when Dr. Hébert saw Ferdie at the Casino tonight, he very prudently took away the large sum you saw in Ferdie's wallet at the tables. When Ferdie came to the doctor's house at midnight, he had only his

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few hundred francs commission in his own wallet, which was in his pocket.

"You see, Dr. Hébert needed that large sum of money in his plan to kill Ferdie. He knew what time Ferdie would call at his house. He knew Mr. Winton would be close behind Ferdie. Mr. Winton would, in fact, walk into the murder and get the blame. All Dr. Hébert had to do was take that packet of *mille* notes, stuff them into another wallet just like Ferdie Davos's, and use it as a trap."

"A trap?" repeated Eleanor.

"A trap," said Colonel March. "Your presence, Miss Hood," he went on, "gave the doctor an unexpected alibi. He left you downstairs in his house. He went upstairs to 'get dressed.' A few minutes before Davos was due to arrive, he went quietly up to the roof of his house —a flat roof, like most of those in La Bandelette. He looked down over the parapet into that cul-de-sac, forty feet below. He saw his own doorstep with the lamp burning over it. He dropped the wallet over the parapet, so that it landed on the pavement before his own doorstep.

"Well?" continued Colonel March. "What would Davos do? What would *you* do, if you walked along a pavement and saw a wallet bulging with thousand-franc notes lying just in front of you?"

Again Jerry Winton saw that dim cul-de-sac. He heard the rain splashing; he saw it moving and gleaming past the door lamp, and past the beam of the lighthouse overhead. He saw the jaunty figure of Davos stop short as though to look at something—

"I imagine," Jerry said, "that I'd bend over and pick up the wallet."

"Yes," said Colonel March. "That's the whole sad story. You would bend over so that your body was parallel with the ground. The back of your neck would be a plain target to anybody standing forty feet up above you, with a needle-sharp knife whose blade is much heavier than the handle. The murderer has merely to drop the knife—stretch out his fingers and drop it. Gravity will do the rest.

"My friend, you looked straight at that murder—and you never saw it! You never saw it because a shifting, gleaming wall of rain, a kind of silver curtain, fell across the door lamp and the beam of the lighthouse. It hid the fall of a thin, long blade made of bright metal. Behind that curtain moved invisibly our ingenious friend Dr. Hébert, who, if he can be persuaded to speak—"

Dr. Hébert could not be persuaded to speak, even when they took him away. But Eleanor Hood and Jerry Winton walked home through the summer dawn, under a sky colored with a less evil silver; and they had discovered any number of mutual acquaintances by the time they reached the hotel.

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a new story by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

St. Patrick's Day in the Morning

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

TITLE: *St. Patrick's Day in the Morning*

TYPE: Detective-Suspense Story

LOCALE: Los Angeles, California

TIME: March 17—and six weeks later

COMMENTS: *Mitchel Brown, an apostle of compassion, obeyed his deeper instincts—and what a spot he found himself in! . . . One of Charlotte Armstrong's most interesting stories.*

VERY CAREFULLY, IN A STATE OF fearful pleasure, he put all the pieces of paper in order. One copy of the manuscript he put into an envelope and addressed it. The other copies he put into an empty suitcase. Then he called an airline and was lucky. A seat for New York in the morning. Morning? What morning? St. Patrick's Day in the morning.

He had been out of this world. But now he stretched, breathed, blinked, and put out feelers for what is known as reality.

See now. He was Mitchel Brown, playwright (God willing), and he had finished the job of revision he had come home to Los Angeles to do. Wowee! Finished!

The hour was a quarter after one in the morning and therefore already the 17th of March. The place was his ground-floor apartment, and it was a mess: smoky, dirty, disorderly. . . . Oh, well, first things had come first. His back was aching, his eyes were burning, his head was light. He would have to clean up, eat, sleep, bathe, shave, dress, pack. But first . . .

He slammed a row of airmail stamps on the envelope and went out. The street was dark and deserted. A few cars sat lumpishly along the curbs. The manuscript thumped down into the mailbox—safe in the bosom of the Postal Service. Now, even if he, the plane, and the other copies perished . . .

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Mitch laughed at himself and turned the corner, feeling suddenly let down, depressed, and forlorn.

The Parrakeet Bar and Grill, he noted gratefully, was still open. He walked the one block and went in. The Bar ran all the way along one wall and the Grill, consisting of eight booths, ran all the way along the other. The narrow room was dim and felt empty. Mitch groped for a stool.

"Hi, Toby. Business slow?"

"Hi, Mr. Brown," The bartender seemed glad to see him. He was a small man with a crest of dark hair, a blue chin, and a blue tinge to the whites of his eyes. "This late on a week night, I'm never crowded."

"The kitchen's gone home eh?" Mitch said. The kitchen was not the heart of this establishment.

"That's right, Mr. Brown. You want any food, you better go elsewhere."

"A drink will do me," said Mitch with a sigh. "*I* can go home and scramble yet another egg."

Toby turned to his bottles. When he turned back with Mitch's usual, he said in an anxious whine, "Fact is, I got to close up pretty soon and I don't know what to do."

"What do you mean, what to do?"

"Look at her." Toby's gaze passed over Mitch's left shoulder.

Mitch glanced behind him and was startled to see there was a woman sitting in one of the booths. Or perhaps one could say lying, since her fair hatless head was down on the red-checked tablecloth. Mitch turned again and wagged inquiring eyebrows.

"Out like a light," said Toby in a hoarse whisper. "Listén, I don't want to call the cops. Thing like that, not so good for the place. But I got a kid sick and my wife is all wore out and I wanted to get home."

"You try black coffee?"

"Sure, I tried." Toby's shoulders despaired.

"How'd she get this way?"

"Not here," said Toby quickly. "Don't see how. So help me, a coupla drinks hit her like that. Trouble is, she's not a bum. You can see that. So what should I do?"

"Put her in a taxi," said Mitch blithely. "Just ship her where she belongs. Why not? She'll have something on her for identity."

"I don't want to mess around with her pocketbook," Toby said fearfully.

"Hm. Well, let's see . . ." Mitch got off the stool. His drink had gone down and bounced lightly and he was feeling cheerful and friendly toward all the world. Furthermore, he felt *very* intelligent and he understood that he had been born to understand everybody.

Toby came, too, and they lifted the woman's torso.

Her face was slack in drunken sleep; but even so it was not an ugly face. It was not young; neither was it old. Her clothing was ex-

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pensive. No, she wasn't a tramp.

Then she opened her eyes and said in a refined voice, "I beg your pardon."

She was not exactly conscious; still this was encouraging. The two men got her to her feet. With their support she could stand. In fact, she could walk. Mitch ran his left arm through the handle of her expensive-looking handbag. The two of them walked her to the door.

"The air maybe?" said the bartender hopefully.

"Right," said Mitch. "Listen, there's a cab stand next to the movie theater. By the time we walk her over there . . ."

Toby said shrilly. "I got to lock up. I got to take care of the place."

"Go ahead," said Mitch, standing in the sweet night air with the strange woman heavy in his arms, "I've got her."

He heard the lock click behind him as he set off on the sidewalk, the woman putting one foot ahead of the other willingly enough. Musing on the peculiar and surprising qualities of "reality," Mitch had guided her halfway along the block before he recognized the fact that the bartender had taken him literally and was not coming along at all.

Oh, well. Mitch was not annoyed. On the contrary, he felt filled with compassion for all human beings. This woman was human and, therefore, frail. He was glad to try to help her to some place of her own.

The neighborhood business section was deserted. They were moving in an empty world. When Mitch had struggled all the way to the next corner, he could see ahead that there were no cabs near the theater. At this time of night the theater was dead and dark, as he should have known. He guessed he hadn't quite been meshed with the gears of ordinary time.

Anyhow, he couldn't turn her over to a handy cab driver. Nor to the police, since there were no policemen around either. There was nothing but pavement, those few lumps of metal left at the curb for the night, and no traffic.

Mitch wouldn't have hailed a motorist anyway. Most motorists were suspicious and afraid. So he did the only thing he could—he kept walking.

He guided her automatic steps around the corner and down the street, for surely, he thought, if he kept her walking, she would begin to be conscious and he could then ask her what *she* wanted him to do about her. This he felt was the right thing. Perhaps he could get out his own car . . .

But the air was not having the desired effect. She began to stumble. Her weight slumped against him. Mitch found he was almost carrying her. Then he discovered that he was standing, holding her upright with both arms, directly in front of his own building. Obviously, the only thing to do was take

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her inside, where he could investigate her identity and telephone for a taxi.

The apartment had not tidied itself up during his absence. He let her weight go and she sagged down on his sofa. He guided her blonde head to a pillow. There she lay, out like a light, a perfect stranger. To straighten the body and make it look more comfortable, he lifted the lower part of her legs. One of her shoes—beautiful shoes in a fine green leather, with a high spike heel and a small brass buckle—one of them came off.

Mitch took hold of the other shoe and also removed it. Full of cosmic thoughts about females and heels, he put her shoes on his desk and slipped her handbag off his arm. It was the same fine green leather.

It did feel sneaky to be rifling the property of a strange woman. Still, it had to be done.

Her name, on the driver's license, was Natalie Maxwell. Her address was in Santa Barbara. Mitch whistled. That knocked over his scheme of sending her home in a cab, since her home was a hundred miles away. Then he found a letter addressed to Mrs. Julius Maxwell and Mitch whistled again. So she was married!

Furthermore, she was married to somebody whose name was familiar. Julius Maxwell. All that came to Mitch's musing memory was an aroma of money. She probably wasn't broke, then. He peered into her wallet and saw a few bills. Not many. So he riffled her check book and whistled for the third time. Well! No penniless waif, this one.

Mitch ran his hand through his hair and considered his predicament. Here he was, harboring a wealthy matron from Santa Barbara who had passed out from liquor. What was he going to do with her?

There was nothing in the bag to tell him where she was staying locally. The letter was woman's chatter from someone in San Francisco.

So what to do?

Well, he might phone the police and dump her on them. This he could not quite imagine. Or, he could phone the residence of Julius Maxwell, in Santa Barbara, and if her husband were there, ask for instructions; or, if he were not there, surely Mitch could ask somebody where Mrs. Maxwell was staying in Los Angeles, and dump her *there*. All this went through his mind and was rejected.

Why cause another human being humiliation and trouble? He didn't think she was ill. Just stinko. Sooner or later the fumes would wear away and she would come to herself. Meantime, she was perfectly safe, right where she was. Heaven knew he had no evil thoughts.

Also, he—Mitchel Brown, playwright, artist, apostle of compassion—*he* was no bourgeois to conform, cravenly fearing for his reputation if he were to do what is "not

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done." Was he, being what he was, to put this human being into a jam with the Law, or even with her own husband? When this human being, for some human reason, had simply inbibed a little too much alcohol? He couldn't do it.

Okay. He had been dragooned by his mood and by the perfidious desertion of Toby the bartender into acting the Samaritan. Why not be the *good* Samaritan, then? Give her a break.

This pleased him. It felt lucky to him. Give her a break. God knows we all need them, he thought piously.

So Mitch scribbled a note. *Dear Mrs. Maxwell: Use my phone if you like. Or be my guest, as long as you need to be.*

He signed it, went into his bedroom, got a light blanket, and spread it over her. She was snoring faintly. He studied her face a moment more. He put the note on the rug under her shoes where she would be sure to see it. Then he went into his bedroom, closed the door, and went to bed.

Mitchel Brown woke up on St. Patrick's Day, early in the morning, absolutely ravenous. He had forgotten to eat anything. Now he remembered. New York! Catch plane! Pack!

He started for his kitchen and at the bedroom door remembered the lady. So he turned and put a robe on before emerging.

He needn't have bothered. She was gone. Her shoes were gone. Her bag was gone. His note was gone. In fact, there was no trace of her at all.

He did *not* wonder whether he had been dreaming. So she had come to and fled. Hm, without even a "Thank you?" Oh, well, panic, he supposed. Ah, human frailty! Mitch shrugged. But he had things to do and not enough time to do them in.

He went into a spell of demon housekeeping, threw everything perishable out of his refrigerator, everything dirty into the laundry bag, everything wearable into his suitcase. He caught the plane by a whisker.

Once on it he began to suffer. He reread his manuscript in his mind's eye and squirmed with doubt. He tried to nap and could not, and then, suddenly, he could . . . and then he was in New York and God was willing and his producer was still hot and eager . . .

Six weeks later Mitchel Brown, playwright, got off the plane in Los Angeles. He had a play on Broadway. The verdict was *comme ci, comme ca.* Time, box office, word of mouth . . . personally he could bear no more. He wasn't licked, but he knew he would be unless he got home and got to work on something else and that, soon.

He had been out of this world all this time, for when one has a

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play in rehearsal, earthquake, major catastrophe, declaration of war mean nothing. Nothing whatever.

He got to his apartment about five A.M. and kicked aside the pile of newspapers he had forgotten to stop. The place smelled stale and wasn't really clean, but no matter. He opened all the windows, mixed himself a highball, and sat down with the last paper on the heap to catch up with the way the western world had wagged since he had left it. International affairs he had glanced over, the last week in the east. Local affairs, of course, were completely unknown to him.

The latest murder, hm . . . Los Angeles papers are always hopeful that a murder is going to turn out to be a big one, so any and every murder gets off with a bang. This one didn't look promising. A mere brawl, he judged. Would die down in a couple of days.

He skimmed the second page where all the older murders were followed up. He had missed two or three. Some woman knifed by an ex-husband. Some man shot in his own hall. Run-of-the-mill. Mitch yawned. He would get out his car, go somewhere for a decent meal, he decided. Tomorrow, back to the salt mines.

At 6:30 P.M. he walked into his favorite restaurant, ordered a drink, settled to contemplate the menu.

She came in quietly about ten minutes later and sat down by herself at a table directly across from Mitch. The first thing he noted, with the tail of his eye, was her shoes. He had seen them before. Yes, and held them—held them in his hands.

His eyes traveled higher and there was Mrs. Julius Maxwell. (Natalie was her given name, he remembered.) It was not only Mrs. Julius Maxwell in the flesh, but Mrs. Julius Maxwell *in the very same clothing she had worn before!* The same green suit, the same pale blouse, and no hat. She was a lady, well-groomed, prosperous, pretty and poised—and now perfectly sober.

Mitch kept his head cocked and his eyes on her, waiting for her to feel his stare and respond to it. Her eyes came to his in a moment, but they were cool and empty of recognition.

Well, of course, he thought. How would she know me? She never *saw* me. He glanced away, feeling amused, then glanced back. Natalie Maxwell was ordering. She sat back, relaxed, and her gaze slipped past him again, returned briefly to note his interest, then went away, indicating none on her part.

Mich could not help feeling that this was not fair. He got up and crossed to her. "How do you do, Mrs. Maxwell?" he said pleasantly. "I am glad you are feeling better."

"I beg your pardon?" she said. He remembered that he had heard her say this, and only this, once before.

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"I'm Mitchel Brown." He waited, smiling down at her.

"I don't believe . . ." she murmured in genteel puzzlement. She had a nice straight nose and, although she was looking up at him, she seemed to be looking down that nose.

"I'm sure you remember the name," Mitch said. "It was the 16th of March. No, it was Saint Patrick's Day in the morning, actually."

"I don't quite . . ."

Was she stupid or what? Mitch said, with a bit of a sting in the tone. "Did you have much of a hangover?"

"I'm very *sorry,*" she said with a little exasperated laugh, "but I really don't know what you are talking about."

"Oh, come now, Natalie," said Mitch beginning to feel miffed, "it was my apartment."

"What?" she said.

"My apartment that you passed out in—here in Los Angeles."

"I am afraid you are making a mistake," she said distantly.

Mitch did not think so.

"Aren't you Mrs. Julius Maxwell?"

"Yes, I am."

"From Santa Barbara?"

"Why, yes, I am." She was frowning a little.

"Then the apartment you woke up in, on Saint Patrick's Day in the morning, was *my* apartment," said Mitch huffily, "and why the amnesia?"

"What is this?" said a male voice.

Mitch swiveled his head and knew at once that here was Mr. Julius Maxwell. He saw a medium-sized, taut-muscled, middle-aged man with a thatch of salt-and-pepper hair and fierce black eyes under heavy black brows. Everything about this man blazoned aggression and possession. He reeked of push and power, of *I* and *Mine*.

Mitchel Brown, playwright, artist, and apostle of compassion, drew his own forces together, as if he folded in some wings.

"Julius," said the blonde woman, "this man knows my name. He keeps talking about Saint Patrick's Day in the morning."

"Oh, he does?" said her husband.

"He says I was in his apartment, here in Los Angeles."

To Mitch Brown came a notion that would explain all this. Obviously, Natalie's husband had never found out where Natalie had been that night. So Natalie had to pretend she didn't know Mitch, because *she* knew, as he did not, that Julius Maxwell was nearby and would appear. But something in the woman's manner did not quite fit this theory. She didn't seem to be concerned enough. She looked straight ahead and her bewilderment was prefunctory.

Still, he thought he should be gallant. "I must have made a mistake," he said. "But the resemblance is remarkable. Perhaps you have a double, Ma'am?"

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He thought this was handsome of him and that it gave her a way out.

"A double?" said Julius Maxwell nastily, "Who uses my wife's *name?*"

Well, of course, if the man was going to be intelligent about it, that tore it. "Sorry," said Mitch lightly.

"Sit down and tell me about it," said Maxwell commandingly. "Mr. . . . er . . .?"

"Brown," said Mitch shortly. He was of a mind to turn on his heel and go away. But he glanced at Natalie. She had opened her handbag and found her compact. This struck him as either offensively nonchalant or pathetically trusting. Or what? Curiosity rose in Mitch—and he sat down.

"Why, I happened into a bar where a lady had had too much to drink," he said, as if this were nothing unusual. "I volunteered to put her in a taxi but there was no taxi. I wound up leaving her passed out on my sofa. In the morning she was gone. That's all there is to the story."

"This was on Saint Patrick's Day?" said Maxwell intently.

"In the small hours. In the morning."

"Then the lady was not my wife. My wife was with me in Santa Barbara at our home that night."

"With you?" said Mitch carefully, feeling a bit of shock.

"Certainly." Maxwell's tone was belligerent.

Mitch was beginning to wonder. The woman had powdered her nose and sat looking as if she couldn't care less. "Not simply in the same building," Mitch ininquired, "as you may have assumed?"

"Not simply in the same building," said Julius Maxwell, "and no assumption. She was *with* me, *speaking* to me, *touching* me, if you like." His black eyes were hostile.

Oh, ho, thought Mitch, then you are a liar, too. Now what *is* all this? He did not care for this Maxwell at all.

"Perhaps I have mistaken her for another lady," he said smoothly, "But isn't it strange that she is wearing exactly the same clothes now that she was wearing on Saint Patrick's Day?"

(Try that one on for size, Mitch thought smugly.)

Julius said ominously, "Do you know who I am?"

"I have heard your name," said Mitch.

"You know that I am an influential man?"

"Oh, yes," said Mitch pleasantly, "In fact, I can smell the money from here."

"How much do you want to forget that you saw my wife in Los Angeles that night?"

Mitch's brows went up.

"On Saint Patrick's Day in the morning," added Julius sneeringly.

Mitch felt his feathers ruffling, his temper flaring. "Why? What is it worth?" he said.

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They locked gazes. It was ridiculous. Mitch felt as if he had strayed into a Class B movie. Then Maxwell rose from the table. "Excuse me." He lashed Mitch with a sharp look which seemed to be saying, "Stay," as if Mitch were a dog. Then he strode off.

Mitch, alone with the blonde woman, said to her quickly, "What do you want me to do or say?"

He was looking at her hand, long-fingered, pink-nailed, limp on the table. It did not clench. It did not even move. "I don't understand," she said in a mechanical way.

"Okay," said Mitch disgustedly. "I came here for dinner and I see no profit in this discussion, so please excuse me."

He got up, crossed over to his own table, and ordered his meal.

Julius Maxwell returned in a few moments and stood looking at Mitch with a triumphant light in his eyes. Mitch waved the wand of reason over the very human activity of his own glands. It was necessary for Mitch's self-respect that he dine here, as he had planned to do, and that he remain unperturbed by these strange people.

His steak had come when a man walked into the room and up to Maxwell's table. There was an exchange of words. Julius rose. Both men came over to Mitch.

Julius said, "This is the fellow, Lieutenant."

Mitch found that the stranger was slipping into the seat beside him and Julius was slipping in beside him on his other hand. He rejected a feeling of being trapped. "What's all this?" he inquired mildly, patting his lips with his napkin.

"Name's Prince," said the stranger. "Los Angeles Police Department. Mr. Maxwell tells me you are saying something about Mrs. Maxwell's being here in town on the night of the 16th of March and the morning of the 17th?"

Mitch sipped from his water glass, watchful and wary.

Julius Maxwell said, "This man was trying to blackmail me with a crazy story."

"I was *what!*" Mitch exploded.

The Police Lieutenant, or whoever he was, had a long lean face, slightly crooked at the bottom, and he had very tired eyelids. He said, "Your story figured to destroy her alibi?"

"Her alibi for *what?*" Mitch leaned back.

"Oh, come off that, Brown," said Julius Maxwell, "or whatever your name is. You knew my wife from having seen her picture in the newspaper."

Mitch's brain was racing. "I haven't seen the papers for six weeks," he said aggressively.

Julius Maxwell's black eyes were bright with that triumphant shine. "Now that," he said flatly, "is impossible."

"Oh, is it?" said Mitch rather

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gently. His role of apostle of compassion was fast fading out. Mitch was now a human clashing with another human and he knew he had to look out for himself. He could feel his wings retracting into his spine. "Alibi for what?" he insisted, looking at the policeman intently.

The policeman sighed. "You want it from me? Okay. On the 16th of last March, late in the evening," he droned, "a man named Joseph Carlisle was shot to death in his own front hall." (Mitch, ears pricked up, remembered the paragraph he had seen just tonight.) "Lived in a canyon, Hollywood Hills," the Lieutenant continued, "Winding road, lonely spot. Looked like somebody rang his bell, he answered, they talked in the hall. It was his own gun that he kept in a table there. Whoever shot him closed the front door, which locked it, and threw the gun in the shrubbery. Then beat it. Wasn't seen—by anybody."

"And what has this got to do with Mrs. Maxwell?" Mitch asked.

"Mrs. Maxwell used to be married to this Carlisle," said the policeman. "We had to check her out. She has this alibi."

"I see," said Mitch.

"Mrs. Maxwell," said Julius through his teeth, "was with me in our home in Santa Barbara that evening and all that night."

Mitch saw. He saw that either Maxwell was trying to save his wife from the embarrassment of suspicion or . . . that compassion was a fine thing but it can get a well-meaning person into trouble. And a few drinks might hit a murderess very hard and very fast. Mitch *knew,* that whatever else Maxwell said, he was lying in his teeth about this alibi. Because the woman, still sitting across this restaurant, was the very same woman whom Mitch Brown had taken in, had given a break.

But nobody was giving Mitch Brown any break. And why all this nonsense about blackmail? Mitch, with his wings folded tight away, said to the Lieutenant, "Suppose I tell you my story." And he did so, coldly, briefly.

Afterward, Maxwell laughed. "You believe that? You believe that he would take a drunken woman home with him—and close the door?"

In his breast Mitch Brown felt the smoulder of dislike burst into a flame of hatred.

"No, no," said Maxwell. "What must have happened was this. He spotted my wife here. Oh, he'd read the papers—don't you believe that he hadn't. He knew she had been married to Joe Carlisle. So, spur of the moment, he tried out his little lie. Might be some profit in it—who knows? Listen to this: when I asked him how much he wanted to keep this story to himself, he asked *me* how much it was worth."

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Mitch chewed his lip. "You've got a bad ear for dialogue," he said. "That is not exactly what I said. Nor is it the sense of what I said."

"Oh, oh," said Maxwell, smiling.

The Lieutenant was pursing noncommittal lips.

Mitch spoke to him. "Who else gives Mrs. Maxwell her alibi?"

"Servants," said the lieutenant gloomily.

"Servants?" said Mitch brightly.

"It only natural," the Lieutenant said, even more gloomily.

"Right," said Mitch Brown. "You mean it is probable that when a man and his wife are at home together only the servants will see them there. But it isn't so probable that a stranger will take in a drunken woman, and leave her to heaven. . . . simply because he feels like giving a human being a break. So this is a study in probability, is it?"

The Lieutenant's mouth moved and Mitch said quickly, "But you want the facts, eh? Okay. The only thing for us to do is go and talk to the bartender."

"That seems to be it," said the Lieutenant promptly. "Right."

Maxwell said, "Right. Wait for us."

He rose and went to fetch his wife. Mitch stood beside the Lieutenant. "Fingerprints?" he murmured. The Lieutenant shrugged. Under those weary eyelids, Mitch judged, the eyes were human. "She has a car? Was the car out?" The Lieutenant shrugged again. "Who else would shoot this Carlisle? Any enemies?"

"Who hasn't?" the Lieutenant said. "We better check with this bartender."

The four of them went in the Lieutenant's car. The Parrakeet Bar and Grill was doing well this evening. It looked brighter and more prosperous. Toby the bartender was there. "Hi, Mr. Brown," he said, "Long time no see."

"I've been back East. Tell this man, Toby, what happened around one thirty on the morning of March 17th."

"Huh?" said Toby. The flesh of his cheeks seemed to go flatter. His eye went duller. Suddenly Mitch knew what was going to happen.

"You see this man or this lady in here between one, two o'clock in the morning last March 17th?" said the Lieutenant and added. "I'm Lieutenant Prince, L.A.P.D."

"No, sir," said Toby. "I know Mr. Brown, of course. He comes in now and again, see? Lives around here. A writer, he is. But I don't remember I ever seen this lady before."

"What about Brown? Was he in here that night or that morning?"

"I don't think so," said Toby. "That's the night, now that I think back—yeah, my kid was sick and I shut the place up earlier than usual. Ask my wife," said Toby the

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bartender with the fixed righteous gaze of the liar.

Lieutenant Prince turned his long face, his sad eyelids, on Mitch Brown.

Mitch Brown was grinning. "Oh, no!" he said. "Not the old Paris Exposition gag!" He leaned on the bar and emitted silent laughter.

"What are you talking about?" Lieutenant Prince said sourly. "You give me corroboration for this story you're telling. Who can tell me about it? Who saw you and this lady that night?"

"Nobody. Nobody," said Mitch genially. "The streets were empty. Nobody was around. Well! I wouldn't have believed it! The old Paris Exposition gag!"

The Lieutenant made an exasperated sound.

Mitch said gaily, "Don't you remember that one? There's this girl and her mother. They go to a Paris hotel. Separate rooms. Girl wakes up in the morning, no mother. Nobody ever saw any mother. No mother's name on the register. No room's got the mother's number. Wait. No—that wasn't it. There *was* a room, but the wallpaper was different.

Julius Maxwell said, "A writer" —as if that explained everything.

"Why don't we all sit down," said Mitch cheerfully, "and tell each other stories?"

His suggestion was accepted. Natalie Maxwell slipped into a booth first; she was blonde, expensive, protected . . . and numb. (Is she doped up with tranquilizers or what? Mitch wondered.) Her husband sat on her right and the policeman sat on her left. Mitch slid in the other side of the Law and faced his adversary.

Mitch Brown's mood was by no means as jaunty as his words had implied. He didn't like the idea of being the victim of the old Paris Exposition gag. But he was not rattled or panicky. On the contrary, his mind began to reconnoiter the enemy. Julius Maxwell, flamboyantly successful—Mitch savored the flavor of the man's reputation. The buccaneer type, ruthless and bold. Julius Maxwell—with money like a club in his hand. Going to make a fool out of Mitchel Brown. Also, there was the little matter of justice. Or mercy.

Mitch felt his wings begin to rustle again.

He said to the woman, gently, "Would you care for something? A highball?"

"I don't drink," said Natalie primly. Her lashes came down. Her tongue touched her lips.

Mitch Brown ran his tongue over his upper lip, very thoughtfully.

Julius Maxwell's energy was barely contained in this place. "Never mind the refreshments," he said. "Get to it. This young man, whoever he is, spotted my wife and knew her from the publicity. He knows I am a rich man. So he thought he'd try a big lie. For the

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sake of the nuisance value, he thought I'd pay *something*. Well, an opportunist," said Julius with a nasty smile, "I can understand."

"I doubt if you understand *me*," said Mitch quietly. "I'm sure you don't realize how old hat that Paris Exposition story is."

"What has any Paris Exposition got to do with it?" snapped Julius. "Now look here, Lieutenant Prince. Can I prosecute this man?"

"You can't prove extortion," said the Lieutenant gloomily. "You should have let him take the money, with witnesses."

"He couldn't do that," said Mitch, "because he knows the thought of money never crossed my mind."

The Lieutenant's eyes closed all the way in great weariness. They opened again and it was apparent that he believed nothing and nobody, yet. "Want to get this straight. Now you say, Mr. Maxwell—"

Julius said, "I say that my wife was at home that evening and all night, as the servants also say, and as the authorities know. So this man is a liar. Who can say why? It is plain that he can't bring anyone or anything to corroborate this yarn he is telling. The bartender denies it. And, if you ask me, the most ridiculous thing he says is his claim that he hasn't read the newspapers for six weeks. Shows you the fantastic kind of mind he's got."

The Lieutenant, without comment, turned to Mitch. "And you say—"

"I say," said Mitch," that I have been in New York City since the 17th of March, attending rehearsals of my play and its opening night."

"A playwriter," said Julius.

"A play*wright*," corrected Mitch. "I guess you don't know what that is. For one thing, it is a person committed to trying to understand human beings. Oddly enough, even you." Mitch leaned over the table. "You are the bold buccaneer, so I've heard. You've pirated money out of the world and now you think money can buy whatever you want. Suppose *I* tell *your* story?"

Julius Maxwell now had a faint sneering smile, but Mitch noted that Natalie had her eyes open. Perhaps her ears were open too. Mitch plunged on.

"Your wife drove down here and shot her ex," he said brutally. (Natalie did not even wince.) "Well, now . . ." Mitch's imagination began to function, from long practice. "I suppose that Natalie felt bad enough, upset enough, maybe even sorry enough, to need a drink and to take too many drinks until she forgot her troubles." Natalie was looking at him. "But when she woke up in my apartment she ran—ran to her car which she must have had. Ran home. Ah, well, what else could she do?" Mitch mused aloud. "She had done this awful thing. Somebody would have to help her."

(Was Natalie holding her breath?)

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"Who would help her?" Mitch said sharply. "*You* would, Maxwell. Why? I'll tell you why. You are not the type to want any wife of yours and the accent is on *yours*—to die in a gas chamber for murder. She'd done something stupid. You bawled her out, I imagine, for the stupidity of it. But you told her not to worry. She was yours, so you would fix it. Money can buy anything. She must do exactly as you say, and then she could forget it." Mitch hesitated. "Did you think she *could* forget it?" he murmured.

Nobody moved or spoke, so Mitch went on. "Well, you got to work. You bribed the servants. Bribed Toby, here. And you checked all around and discovered that there was only one other person who could reveal that she really had no alibi. That was a playwright. Oh, you checked on me too. Sure you did. You knew very well where I was and what I was doing. You found out the day and the hour I was due back in Los Angeles."

Lieutenant Prince snorted. "Sounds nuts," he broke in. "You say he's been bribing everybody? Why didn't he bribe *you*?"

Mitch turned a glazed eye on him. "Trouble was, I *hadn't* read the papers. I didn't know that I knew. So how could he bribe me? He put me down for an idiot," said Mitch. "For what sane person doesn't read the paper for six weeks? And then he thought of a way."

Mitch addressed himself to Maxwell. "You had some hireling watching my apartment. And you and Natalie were ready and waiting, and quite nearby." Mitch sensed the policeman's shrug coming and he added quickly, "Otherwise, how come the very first day I'm in town I run into Natalie, and Natalie in exactly the same clothes?"

"Who says they're the same?" said Maxwell smoothly, "except you?"

"She came into the restaurant," said Mitch, "alone."

"Since I had a phone call to make . . ."

"Alone," Mitch persisted, ignoring the interruption, "and why? To encourage me to come over and speak to her. That's why the same clothes—to make sure I'd recognize her again. After she pulls the blank on me, Maxwell moves in. You, knowing how deep you've bribed your defenses behind you, press me into the position of looking like an opportunist—possibly like an extortionist. 'Brown's a writer,' you say to yourself. Which is 'a nut', in your book. Nobody is going to believe a word *he* says.' You'll discredit me. You'll rig a little scene. You'll call a real policeman for a witness."

"Why?" croaked the Lieutenant.

Mitch was startled. "Why what?"

"Why cook all this up and call *me*?"

"Simple," Mitch said. "What if I had finally read the papers and rec-

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ognized her name? What if *I* had come to *you*? What am I then? A good citizen. Isn't that so? This way, he's made it look as if I came to *them*. Making me look like an opportunist. And he's the good citizen who called you in."

Air came out of the Lieutenant, signifying nothing.

"What a wacky scheme!" Mitch said it first. (Damn it, it *was* wacky. It wasn't going to sound probable.) "How unrealistic you are!" he taunted desperately.

Maxwell sat there smugly. "You've got the imagination, all right," he said with a wry smile. "Wild one."

Then the policeman surprised them both. "What a minute, Brown. You're saying that Maxwell *knows* his wife is the killer. That he's acting as accessory after the fact? You *mean* to say that?"

Mitch hesitated.

Maxwell said, "He hasn't thought it out. Listen, he is just spinning a yarn, Lieutenant. He was challenged to do it. He's proving that he's clever. And that he is—for fiction. Call it a good try."

Mitch saw his way pointed out for him.

"Or, possibly," said Maxwell after a moment, "he was only trying to pick up a good-looking woman." Maxwell showed his teeth in a smile.

Mitch understood—he was being shown how to save face. It was very seductive. Not only that, he was aware that if he went along, the power, the money, the influence here, there, and everywhere, would work to Mitchel Brown's commercial advantage.

So he said slowly, "I *know* that he is a liar. I *believe* that he is an accessory after the fact. Yes, that's what I mean to say."

Julius Maxwell's face darkened. "Prove it," he snapped. "Because if you just *tell* it, I will have legal recourse, and I will have your skin. I don't sit still to be called a liar."

Mitch looked up and said with an air of pure detached curiosity, "What ever made you think that *I* would?"

"Look, give me *something*," said the Lieutenant with sudden anger, "give me something to go on."

Maxwell said contemptuously, "He can't. It's all moonshine."

Mitch was scrambling for something that would help him. "I never thought of a car," he murmured. "But I should have guessed, from the shoes she wears, that she hadn't walked here. I don't suppose she has walked much since she married so much money."

Mitch knew that Maxwell was swelling up with rage, or simulated rage. But he thought that Natalie was listening. It came to him, with conviction, that in spite of everything she *was* a human being.

So he looked at her and said, "Why did you leave this Joe Carlisle, I wonder? What kind of man was he? Did you quarrel? Did you hate him? How did he still have

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the power to hurt you that much?"

She looked at him, lips parted, eyes bright, startled. Her husband was on the point of getting up and hitting someone, and Mitch knew whom.

Lieutenant Prince said, "Sit down, Maxwell." He said to Mitch, "And you, hold onto your tongue. Don't analyze me any characters. Or emote me any motives. She's got an alibi unless you can break it, and evidence is what the law requires."

"But what about *my* motive for lying?" Mitch demanded. "Money? That's ridiculous!" He stopped, staring. Natalie Maxwell had opened her bag, taken out a lipstick. Murder, prison . . . she paints her mouth. Slander, blackmail . . . she paints her mouth. How probable was that?

"Give me proof," the Lieutenant said angrily.

"In a minute," Mitch said, as his heart bounced upward. He leaned back. "Let me pursue the theme of money. I imagine Natalie's got whatever money can buy. Her living is paid for. She has charge accounts."

Maxwell said, "Let's go. He's rambling now."

The Lieutenant began to push at Mitch's thigh, nudging him out of the booth.

"Know what I *can* prove?" Mitch said.

"What?" said the Lieutenant.

"That I was working in my apartment all that day and into the night on the 16th, 17th of March. Those walls are cardboard and I am a nuisance—well-known in the building."

"So you were working," said the policeman. "What of it?"

"I wasn't in Santa Barbara," said Mitch cheerfully. He reached over and plucked up Natalie's handbag, the green one that matched the shoes.

"Now just a minute," Maxwell growled.

"See if her check book is in there," said Mitch, pushing the bag at the Lieutenant. "It's a fat one. Her name's printed on it, and all that. I don't think she has much occasion to write checks. It may be the same one."

The Lieutenant had his hands on the bag, but he looked unenlightened.

"Look at it. It's evidence," Mitch said.

The Lieutenant's hands moved and Maxwell said, "I'm not sure you have the right . . ." But the policeman's weary lids came up, only briefly, and Maxwell was silent.

The Lieutenant took out a check book. "It's fat," he said. "Starts February 21. What of it?"

Mitch Brown leaned his head on the red leatherette and kept his eyes high. "Nobody on earth . . . unless Natalie remembers, which I doubt . . . but nobody *else* on earth can know what the balance on her check stubs was on Saint Patrick's Day in the morning. Even her bank couldn't know. *But what if I know?*

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How could I? Because *I looked,* while she was snoring on my sofa and I had to find out who she was and how I could help her and whether she needed any money."

The Lieutenant's hand riffled the stubs. "Well?"

"Shall I name it for you? To the penny?" Mitch was sweating. "Four thousand six hundred and fourteen dollars, and sixty-one cents," he said slowly and carefully.

"Right," snapped the Lieutenant and his eyes came up, wide-open and baleful on Julius Maxwell.

But Mitch Brown was not heeding and felt no triumph. "Natalie," he said, "I'm sorry. I wanted to give you a break. I didn't know what the trouble was. I wish you could have told me."

Her newly reddened lips were trembling.

"Not so I could buy off the consequences," Mitch said. "I'd have called the police. But I *would* have listened."

Natalie put her blonde head down on the red-checked tablecloth where it had once rested before. "I didn't mean to do it," she sobbed. "But he kept at me, Joe did. Until I couldn't take any more."

Julius Maxwell, who had been thinking about evidence, said too late, "Shut up!"

The Lieutenant went for the phone.

Mitch sat there, quiet now. The woman was weeping. Maxwell said in a cold, severe way, "Natalie, if you . . ." He drew away from contamination. He was going to pretend ignorance.

But she cried out, "*You* shut up! *You* shut up! I've told you and told you and you never even tried to understand. You said, give Joe a thousand dollars. He'd go away. You said that's all he wanted. You would n't even listen to what I was going through, and Joe talking, talking, about our baby that was dead . . . starved, Joe said, because she had no mother. *My* baby," she shrieked, "that *you* wouldn't have, because she wasn't yours."

Now her pink-painted fingernails clawed at her scalp and the rings on her fingers were tangled in her hair. "I'm sorry," she wept. "I never meant to make the gun go off. I just wanted to stop him. I just couldn't take any more. He was killing me . . . driving me crazy . . and money wouldn't stop him."

Mitch's heart was heavy for her. "Didn't you know what *matters?*" he barked at Maxwell. "Did you think it was mink, diamonds—that stuff?"

"The child died," said Julius Maxwell, "of natural causes."

"*Yes,* he thought it was mink," screamed Natalie. "And oh, my God . . . it *was!* I know that now. So he said he would fix it—but he can't fix what I know, and I hope to die."

Then she lay silent, as if already dead, across the red-checked tablecloth.

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Julius Maxwell's face was losing color, as the policeman came back and murmured, "Have to wait." But the Lieutenant was uneasy. "Say, Brown," he said. "you can remember a row of six figures for six weeks? You a mathematical genius or something? You got what they call a photographic memory?"

Mitch felt his brain stir. He said lightly, "It stuck in my mind. First place, it repeats. You see that? 461-461. To me that's an awful lot of money."

"To me too," the Lieutenant said. "Everybody in here heard what she said, I guess."

"Sure, heard her confess and implicate him as the accessory. Take a look at Toby, for instance. *He's* had it. There's going to be plenty of evidence."

The Lieutenant looked down upon the ruin of the Maxwells. "Guess so," he said tightly.

Later that night Mitch Brown was sitting up to a strange bar. He said to the strange bartender. "Say, you ever know that the 17th of March is *not* Saint Patrick's birthday?"

"What d'ya know?" the bartender murmured politely.

"Nope. It's the day he died," said Mitch. "I write, see? So I read. Bits of information like that stick in my mind. I've got no memory for figures and yet . . . Know the year Saint Patrick died? It was the year 461."

"That so?" said the bartender.

"You take 461 twice and put the decimal in the right place. Of course that's not very *believable,*" Mitch said, "although it really happened—on Saint Patrick's Day in the morning. How come I knew—me a person who doesn't always read the newspaper—the year Saint Patrick died? Well, a fellow doesn't want to be made a fool of, does he? And probable is probable and improbable is improbable—but it's all we've got to go on sometimes. But I'll tell *you* something," Mitch pounded the bar. "Money couldn't have bought it."

The bartender said soothingly, "I guess not, Mac."

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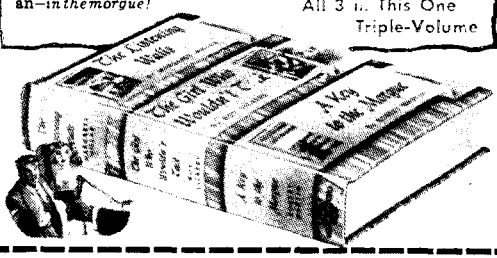

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